# High School Romance

In High School Romance," Saint Aimé opens a heartfeir window into the challenges and triumphs of teenage life in Rwonda. Fueled by his own high school experiences, this book shares a journey of friendship, love, and personal growih. capturing the bitterswect essence of youth and the lessons learned along the way.

BEYOND THE BELL:

SAINT AIMÉ

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# Beyond the Bell:High school Romance

Preface

Dear Reader,

This book you are about to read is more than a story. It is a journey through the most important years of my life—the years I spent in high school. These pages are filled with real struggles, moments of joy, lessons from mistakes, and the silent victories that shaped me into who I am today.

I did not write this story to glorify myself, but to share an experience that I believe many students and young people can relate to. Some of you may see yourselves in the moments of peer pressure, others may connect with the search for true friendship, while some may feel inspired by the courage to stay focused when everything else seems to distract them.

My hope is simple: that as you read, you will learn from my journey. You will see that success is not a straight path—it is built on sacrifices, tears, laughter, and determination. You will understand that every mistake carries a lesson, and every challenge prepares us for a brighter tomorrow.

This story belongs not only to me, but also to every young person who dares to dream. If it inspires you to study harder, to choose friends wisely, to stay disciplined, or simply to believe in yourself, then my purpose has been fulfilled.

Thank you for choosing to walk with me through these pages. May the lessons within this book remain with you long after you close the final chapter.

With gratitude,
Saint Aimé

# INTRODUCTION

Every story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Mine begins in the classrooms, corridors, and dusty playgrounds of high school—a place where dreams were shaped, temptations tested us, and discipline became the bridge between failure and success. This is not just a story about books and exams. It is the story of growth, friendship, love, mistakes, and the relentless search for a brighter tomorrow.

When I first entered high school, I was like any other teenager—curious, full of energy, and uncertain about the future. At that age, many of us are easily carried away by peer pressure, distracted by love affairs, or drawn into bad groups. But my journey was different. I faught against distractions, sometimes winning, sometimes nearly falling. I discovered that adolescence is a battlefield, and the choices made in those years can determine the entire course of one's life.

I met friends who pushed me forward and others who tried to pull me back. I discovered the sweetness of true friendship and the bitterness of betrayal. I witnessed how love, when it comes too early, can shake one's focus, but also how encouragement from the right person can give strength when hope is weak. In those years, I found myself asking questions: Who am I? What do I want to become? How do I balance dreams with reality?

High school was more than a place of study. It was a mirror that showed me who I really was. Every exam, every teacher's word, every mistake I made, and every success I celebrated became pieces of a puzzle that formed the person I am today. I learned that the greatest battles are not fought on paper during examinations, but inside the heart—where discipline wrestles with temptation, and patience wrestles with fear.

This book is my journey. From the day I first entered high school with innocence and fear, to the day I walked out after completing my national examinations with pride and hope, it is a story filled with lessons for every young person. Some chapters will make you laugh, others might make you cry, but all of them will remind you that success does not come by chance. It is earned through sacrifice, courage, and persistence.

If you are a student, this story is for you. If you are a young person struggling to find meaning in your daily battles, this story is for you. And even if you have long finished your studies, this story will remind you of the power of discipline, the value of true friends, and the importance of never giving up on your dreams.

So, turn the page with me. Walk with me through the classrooms, the dormitories, the exam halls, and the long nights of study. Feel the joy, the pain, the doubt, and the triumphs. This is not just my story—it is the story of every student who has ever dared to dream of a better tomorrow.

Moreover,in this story you'll also know why many individuals misconstrue the authentic essence of love. When they fail to regulate their emotions, they often find themselves mired in remorse. Research indicates that high school years are a fertile ground for the emergence of romantic feelings—particularly unanticipated ones—frequently instigated by peer influence. Within the pages of this book, you will gain a profound comprehension of love’s true nature. You will encounter insights drawn from my own experiences, including the period when I became entangled with misguided companions who persistently pressured me to pursue romantic liaisons with unfamiliar girls, even when their own aspirations remained unfulfilled. You will also discover how I eventually met a young girl of remarkable beauty and intelligence. Love, I came to learn, is never an imposition; it is the harmonious convergence of two hearts and minds.

# Chapter one:A NEW BEGINNING

When I'm about to spell the term high school I firstly breath hard because this isn't the normal place, I've seen some of my best friends who came at high school with goals but they didn't achieve them, I've seen others who just came aimless but they later achieved more .

Some of the factors that led to my friends' failure is love affairs, I've seen some of my friends who came with purpose and courage to learn but caused by love the forgot what brought them to school and very soon they find themselves regretting it later. They don't really know what love is,we do have three kinds of love romantic love, filial love and parental love but in this story of mine I'm going to tell you more about romantic love.

All parents wish their children to become strong people in the society and that's why a parent will pay almost 80% of his/her salary to send his/her child at best school but what they don't know is that you can know someone physically but not mentally, most of the time children disappoint their parents which often lead to their regretting.

Friends, High school life is full of challenges, worse situations where you regret the reason why you came there you'll actually meet some friends who want you to grow and shine and get success in life and others who want you to step back and stunt without achieving anything but in this life the path that you choose to pass through determines your Future.

But before falling deeper in my high life story we have to understand what love is we've all read different stories about the origin of love but when you try to figure it out you find yourself returning to the point that you've started at, truly no body knows the real origin of love, if you read the Bible you will find that love had been there since the beginning of the world,as it was written in Genesis God created people to love each other that was a love of God's children.

But if you also read the stories written by the different world's philosophers you will find another origin for example the story written by Plato.According to a story told by the Greek philosopher Plato,a long time ago human beings were not shaped the way we are today. In the beginning, each person was round and whole. They had four arms, four legs, and one head with two faces[don't jump]. They could walk

or even roll quickly in any direction.

These original humans were strong — so strong that they began to challenge the gods themselves. The king of the gods, Zeus, was worried. But instead of destroying humans, he came up with another plan. He decided to cut each human in half.

From that day on, every person became only one half of what they used to be. Each half felt incomplete, missing something deep inside. This is why, according to the myth, humans spend their lives searching for their “other half.” That half is what we call love.

Plato’s idea is that love is not just a feeling or attraction. It is the deep, natural desire to become whole again — to reconnect with the part of us that was lost. When we meet someone and feel truly connected, it is like finding the missing piece of ourselves.

Even though those two stories tell something about the origin of love I believed none, what I tried to do is learning the real meaning of love but until now I have failed to truly comprehend the it's real meaning. What I mostly understand is that in this world, the path you choose can either make you fall or nurture you, helping you grow and have a brighter future. When someone chooses to fall in love, there's some parts of the brain that become occupied instead of thinking about what is important to you you're always thinking about love affairs, even though this process is not easily understandable I know you're going to get it well.

On one hand, love can function like a remote control; on the other hand, it can also be used like a remote control—but do not confuse the two ideas.

When the most reckless boy and girl fall in love, if they are not skilled in managing their emotions, they may become overpowered and eventually addicted to love. Many of their daily responsibilities may be delayed or handled without clear decision-making. Love can shatter a person’s heart when they fail to control their emotions, and sometimes this despair may drive a boy or girl to commit suicide. This is how love can negatively influence someone—operating like a remote that can manipulate the mind and steer a person wherever it wishes, compelling them to act under its command.

However, when the wisest boy and girl fall in love, for them, love becomes like a sturdy roof that shields a house from being destroyed by fierce winds. These two will know how to resolve conflicts, often caused by misunderstandings, and their love will become the foundation of their lives. Their bond will strengthen day by day, and that is when we can say that love has had a positive impact—when someone has learned to use it like a remote, rather than being controlled by it.

Now as I'm approaching the beginning of my high life story, I want to tell about five things that can be avoided inorder not to be controlled by love even if you're a student at high school,because in this modern world young bloods think that every stress is solved by love affairs, for them love has became like plastic tools, but why can't we learn not to be controlled by love.

I don't ignore that love is one of the most powerful emotions a person can feel that can lift you to the highest places of joy, but if you’re not careful, it can also cloud your judgment and take control of your life. I once saw a close friend lose himself completely in love—forgetting his goals, neglecting his friends, and even abandoning his values. Watching that happen taught me an important lesson: love should be a part of your life, not the driver of it.

And that's why to night I have decided to talk a bit of my life experience related to love, here are five things you can avoid if you don’t want love to control you:

Number one avoid Losing Your Identity cause

When people fall in love, they sometimes change everything about themselves to please the other person. They give up their hobbies, opinions, and even dreams. The truth is, the right person will love you for who you are—not for who you pretend to be. Hold onto your uniqueness.

Number two avoid neglecting Your Goals my friends even though we all believe that

Love feels good,it won’t replace education, career, or personal growth. If you start skipping studies or delaying your plans just to be with someone, you risk losing the very future you dreamed of. Keep your priorities balanced, no matter how strong the emotions get.

Number three avoid relying on Love for Happiness through my experience I found that

Some people make their partner their only source of joy. When that relationship shakes, their whole life falls apart. Learn to be happy alone—build your own inner peace, hobbies, and friendships. That way, love will add to your happiness, not be your entire source of it.

Number four avoid Ignoring Red Flags

When emotions run high, it’s easy to overlook problems—disrespect, lies, controlling behavior. But ignoring red flags only leads to pain later. Trust your instincts and value your self-respect more than your feelings.

Number five avoid Losing Balance in Your Life

If love consumes all your time, you risk pushing away family, friends, and important responsibilities. A healthy relationship should allow you to still enjoy other parts of life—spiritual growth, work, studies, and personal passions.

In the end of these five aspecs let me let you know that, love should be like a gentle flame: warm enough to comfort you, but never so wild that it burns away your dreams and self-worth. The key is simple—love deeply, but live wisely.

My true high school life journey began when I entered high school, after having failed the National Examination in Primary Six, I was about fourteen years old . That failure was largely the result of my involvement with bad company—reckless gangs that cared little for education or the future. By some twist of fate, I was among the few in my group who still managed to get the opportunity to move on to high school.

However, when I first stepped into that new chapter of my life I mean when I entered high school for the first time, I changed nothing about my behaviors that wasn't good. The very first friend I made was a very smart boy, physically good but mentally empty and he was very quiet but his silence hide a nature that was far more troublesome than it seemed he was very lazy, careless and violent.

The year 2019 felt like the beginning of my downfall—a moment in life when a single wrong choice could shape my entire future. My classroom was filled with many beautiful girls,I think you all understand the teen girls who are starting high school,, yet I paid little attention to them. I had made a personal vow not to be swayed by unfamiliar faces or to fall in love with strangers. My focus, or so I thought, would remain on my own path[learning].

My friends, the beginning of my secondary one class in high school was like a new beginning with a Shadow because when I first stepped into the vast compound of my high school in Senior One, I was filled with a mixture of apprehension and excitement. The air smelled of promise—fresh notebooks, polished shoes, and the hope of new beginnings. I had told myself that this would be the chapter where I would shape my future, leaving behind the mistakes of primary school which had led to my failure.

It was during those early weeks that I met Underson my first friend whom I mentioned above what I knew is that he was from the noble family.You can't understand the way his face carried a mischievous smile, the kind that could make you feel like you were about to hear something thrilling. He was talkative, confident, and had a knack for making ordinary moments feel like adventures. What I didn’t realize then was that beneath that façade lay a dangerous magnetism that could pull a person off their path without them even noticing in few days I started forgetting my duties at school.

Honestly Underson had an unusual habit—one I should have recognized as a warning sign from the start. Almost every week, he would appear with a wad of money not below 100,000rfw, casually explaining that he had “borrowed” it from his home. In truth, he was stealing. But back then, my sense of morality was blurred by the allure of easy access to things I had never been able to afford.

Instead of staying in class, we would sneak out through the back fence, blending into the town like shadows escaping discipline. Our days were filled with activities that felt exhilarating at the time: learning to drive old rusted cars on dusty backroads, spending afternoons in noisy bars, and drinking until our laughter drowned out the sound of reason and at 5pm we would go back at school to take our school bags and return at home.

For a while, it felt like we were kings of our own little world—untouchable guys in entire school, free and defiant, writing notes was not our duty, making revision meant nothing for us. But what I did not see was that we were, in reality, prisoners to our recklessness.Our gang was really popular in the entire school, from the lowest to the highest leader in school our faces were known and being given a week as a punishment was like a great chance to have a rest for the previous' days

hungover and tiredness.

By the way It didn’t take long for the consequences to surface. My academic performance, once average but promising, began to crumble. But even though you couldn't find any notebook in my school bag I was one of the most quick learners in class not like underson whom you couldn't ask the meaning of Biology which was a very easy definition in our biology book , later caused by peer pressure my all test scores plummeted, my teachers’ patience wore thin, and my name was often mentioned in the staffroom for all the wrong reasons.

At home, my family could see the change. I became withdrawn, irritable, and careless with my responsibilities to study.My evenings were spent daydreaming about the next reckless adventure instead of revising my notes. The thrill I once felt when escaping class started to fade, replaced by an unshakable heaviness every time I saw my failing grades.

Yet, I stayed in the cycle—because Underson was more than a friend; he was an anchor, pulling me into deeper waters, even as I was gasping for air.My friend this friend of mine was not only drunker but he was also love addicted towards girls. this is the time when I started to realize that high school love is limited but for me you couldn't ever find at least talking to a girl,I didn't Care about underson's behaviors cause he was like my big brother I felt like he knew what he was doing.

My separation with my friend underson came at the end of the academic year of secondary one. My grades were so poor that they became a silent warning bell—change, or be left behind forever. Moving to Senior Two meant a change in class streams, and by some twist of fate, Underson was no longer beside me.This was like a big change in my life

During the vocation of secondary one in October 2019 my life without underson was very hard,at first, the absence felt strange, like walking without a shadow.But in few days I realized how much of my daily rhythm had been dictated by him—what we did, where we went, how we thought about the world. Slowly, without his presence, my days grew quieter.But you can ask your self how I got the marks to allow me to move on to secondary two infact I was always absent in class, that was natural interest,in that days I began to read empty notebooks though my academic wounds would take time to heal.

Days passed until when we reached the beginning of the year 2020 in which I was ready to start my secondary two class with grades that I wasn't proud of ,40% marks and that is when I heard the News That Shook Me when I arrived at school at the first day.

Several hours later when I have been sitting in class , word reached me: Underson had been involved in a serious accident. Details were vague—some said it was while driving recklessly as we used to do together, others claimed it was after a night of drinking.

My feelings were tangled. On one side, I felt relief—relief that I had been spared from sharing his fate, that my separation from him had possibly saved my life. On the other side, there was a hollow ache. This was someone I had once called a friend, someone with whom I had shared countless afternoons of laughter and mischief out of the school ground. To know that his choices had caught up with him was painful.

It was both a good story for me, because it confirmed that walking away was the right decision, and a bad story because it was a brutal reminder of where I could have ended up when I had decided to stay together with him but then he had been laying on the hospital bed and me sitting on classroom desk, that was all God's plans.

During almost the year I spent with underson I learned a lot because if you look back, my time with Underson was both a curse and a gift. It was a curse because it almost destroyed my education, my relationships, and my self-respect. Yet, it was a gift because it taught me one of the most valuable lessons of my life: the people you surround yourself with are like the wind—they can either carry your sails toward your destination or blow you far off course.

If I had stayed by his side, I might have shared his misfortune. Instead, I learned that discipline, self-control, and the courage to walk away from toxic influences are the true pillars of success.

Today in my new class I carry that lesson wherever I go.In this class I know none of the students all faces seem to be new in my eyes and if there's one of the students who was my classmate in secondary one I cant know him because I left my class only knew my gang members and they had all repeated.

In the beginning of the first term I was really good in class and all the teachers knew me, some time when I see young students laughing with the wrong crowd, skipping classes, and chasing the thrill of the moment, I see a reflection of my past self—and I silently hope they find their turning point before it’s too late.

My friends you can't understand how when I crossed the threshold into Senior Two, I carried with me the fragile belief that this year would be different. I told myself that the reckless chaos of Senior One had been nothing more than a bad season—something I could now leave behind, the way a snake sheds its skin.

The first term seemed to prove my optimism right. I was punctual in class, my notebooks were neatly filled, and I felt a renewed eagerness to engage in lessons. Teachers, who had once looked at me with thinly veiled disappointment, now nodded approvingly when I answered questions. I felt as though the ghosts of my past were retreating.

But life has a cruel way of testing the lessons we claim to have learned.i know you are curious to know what happened after.

Truly you can hardly believe that I ended the first term without any one of my classmates to become friends and I became the forth positioned student in class but the begging of the second term was like the Arrival of the Trio.

It began innocently enough. A group of three boys—whose presence in the class was as loud as it was magnetic—started including me in their conversations,the first one was Kendrick, Johnson and Peter. They were quick-witted, confident, and seemed to have an endless supply of stories that could make anyone laugh. Unlike Underson, they didn’t sneak out of school every day, nor did they flaunt stolen money.

At first glance, they seemed like a safer choice of friends. But soon, I began to see the cracks beneath the surface, their habits seemed to tache day by day the first mistake I made is that I didn't leave their gang ASAP.

Their main obsession was girls[ but especially Kendrick]. The way they spoke about them was almost like a sport, a competition to see who could “win” the most attention. Their afternoons were spent writing letters filled with exaggerated promises, loitering near the girls’ classrooms, or creating elaborate plans to meet them in secret corners of the school compound.

It didn’t take long for them to notice my lack of interest in their games. “Why don’t you try?” Johnson would ask, as though I were missing out on the greatest pleasure in life. I would laugh it off, telling them I had no intention of chasing after strangers.By the way this is not because I wasn't romantic but because none of the girls would fullfil me.

At first, my refusal seemed to amuse them, but their amusement soon turned to determination. They began to see my resistance as a challenge, something they needed to break. When they realized they couldn’t lure me through romance, they shifted tactics—they started inviting me to skip certain lessons with them.

The were acting like a hunter with a trap who's persuading a rabbit just to come and be caught in that trap or this was like the Slippery Slope to me

At first, I resisted. I told them I was busy or pretended to be unwell. But their persistence was relentless. Eventually, I found myself agreeing “just this once.”Heaven Gog I'm I'nt gonna be affected,I told my self.

After few days we would leave the classroom quietly, moving like shadows across the compound until we reached the small town nearby. Our excursions were less wild than those I had with Underson—no stolen money, no reckless driving—but they were distractions nonetheless. We wandered through shops, shared snacks we couldn’t afford, and idled in places where we had no real purpose being.

It felt harmless at first, but every hour I spent away from my desk was an hour stolen from my future.All these three guys had no money that why we could get out of the class in the morning and return in twenty past twelve for having lunch at school.

There came a day when I sat in the back of the classroom, watching the teacher’s lips move but hearing nothing. My mind was drifting, and in that moment I realized something chilling—this was the same slippery path I had walked the year before.

I had separated from Underson believing that physical distance alone could save me. But I now understood the truth: change doesn’t happen simply because you leave a person behind. If your mindset remains the same, you will always find

a new “Underson” in another form.

For me weeks turned into months, and my academic progress began to falter. The teachers’ approving nods became rare. My exercise books began to show gaps —unfinished notes, missed assignments, careless mistakes.

Inside me, a conflict brewed. Part of me wanted to cut ties with the trio entirely and return to the disciplined path I had briefly walked at the start of the year. Another part feared the loneliness that might follow. Friends—even bad ones—filled a certain emptiness that I wasn’t ready to confront.

One evening, as the sun dipped behind the hills and the campus grew quiet, I sat alone on a bench. My friends were elsewhere may be at their homes as we studied day school,I thought they were laughing and chasing their pursuits, but I was struck by an emptiness that their company had failed to fill.

In that moment, a hard truth settled in my mind: no matter how many times you restart, life will always place temptations in your path. The real test isn’t avoiding them entirely—it’s learning to say “no” even when the whole world expects you to say “yes.”

In the beginning of the third term of secondary two is unforgettable time in my mind because that's when I made the First Steps Away from this unblessed gang.

The few days back after the beginning of term three, I began the slow process of distancing myself. I stopped joining their mid-lesson disappearances, stayed in the classroom during break, and started spending more time in the library.Animal farm was my first book to read when I firstly entered the school library,"I wish I had done this before",I said to myself.

After almost a week without putting my eyes on this expired gang I once met them they noticed, of course. “You’ve changed,” Kendrick said with a hint of mockery. I didn’t argue. I simply smiled, because for the first time in months, I knew that I was finally starting to.

As days passed we were anticipating the coming of the third term exaxs which always seemed to hard for me and then I had some confidence brought by the books that I had been reading in two weeks I found that my lingering in school library wasn't for nothing.

By the end of that year of 2020, I was not perfect. I still had my weaknesses, my moments of poor judgment. But I had begun to understand something that I had been blind to before: friends are not defined by how much fun they bring into your life, but by whether they bring you closer to or further from the person you want to be.

Senior Two didn't deliver the miraculous transformation I had hoped for, but it gave me a lesson far more valuable—it taught me that real change is an inside job. Until you master yourself, you will always be vulnerable to the same mistakes, no matter where you go or who you meet.

It was that afternoon when I was sitting in classroom I started to memorize two stories of the girls who were my friends in previous years,the first one was a very beautiful girl,her name was Amina,she had always been the pride of her family. From the time she could remember, she had worked tirelessly in school, enduring fourteen years of lessons, exams, and sleepless nights, always striving for excellence. Her dedication had paid off; she graduated from secondary school with honors as she was second ranked student at the list of the best National exam performers, and everyone around her believed that her life would only continue to shine.

But graduation brought with it a strange sense of freedom. For the first time, Amina felt untethered from the strict routines of school. She no longer had teachers monitoring her every move, nor the constant weight of homework and exams. She believed she had completed her duties, that life now would be about enjoyment, exploration, and—most of all—love. Friends high life is full of challenges because this girl was driven by past high school life and find herself in inequitable whole.

It started subtly. Amina attended social gatherings, joined local youth events, and began meeting new people. Among them was Jean pier, a young man who seemed charming, confident, and attentive. He paid her compliments, listened to her dreams, and made her feel special in ways she had never experienced. Amina, who had spent most of her adolescence focused on school, found herself drawn to the excitement of his attention.

“What’s wrong with enjoying life a little?” she asked herself. “I’ve worked hard for so long; I deserve happiness.”

And so, her first romance began. But what seemed like innocent affection soon became complicated. Jean’s attention was not exclusive; he had other girls who vied for his attention, yet Amina, blinded by the novelty of love, ignored the warning signs.

Months passed, and Amina found herself caught in a pattern. Each new encounter brought excitement, but also a growing emptiness she couldn’t name. She believed she was in control, but in reality, she was drifting into danger she started running through the boys,She did not consider the risks of her choices, thinking herself invincible after years of disciplined living.

It was only about two weeks before starting University with the government bursery when there came the night that changed everything. A routine health check revealed that she had contracted HIV. The diagnosis hit her like a lightning strike. All the freedom, all the fleeting joys, now seemed meaningless in the shadow of a life-altering reality.

Sitting alone in her room, Amina reflected on the years she had spent studying, the sacrifices she had made, and the bright future she had imagined. Fourteen years of education, countless hours of effort, and yet her life could be cut short by decisions made in a moment of curiosity and desire.

Tears streamed down her face as she realized the gravity of her actions. She had thought love was something to be chased, something to be collected and enjoyed, but she had never truly understood its consequences. Her story was no longer one of achievement and pride—it had become a lesson, harsh and unforgiving, for those who would follow in her footsteps.

Amina wanted her experience to reach others, to warn young boys and girls about the dangers of impulsive love. “Do not mistake freedom for carelessness,” she thought. “Do not believe that life is endless, nor that consequences are far away. Every choice matters.”

From that moment, Amina dedicated herself to raising awareness. She shared her story, hoping to prevent others from experiencing the regret and pain that now consumed her. She spoke at community centers, youth groups, and schools,

emphasizing not only the importance of safe relationships but also the value of self-respect, discipline, and foresight.

Her life had taken a tragic turn, but even in her suffering, Amina's voice became a beacon of caution. She could not undo the past, but she could illuminate the path for others, showing that love, while beautiful, could also be dangerous if approached without wisdom.

Another girl is Betty who was my closest friend when I was in secondary one. Her beauty was really attractive to any boy she also spent almost six years in high school,this girl worked as well as possible her performance in class was incomparable,but only two weeks after performing secondary six national exam with the grades(92%) she felt like this was gonna be the end of her all duties she started to visit her age mate boys After her first encounter with Alain, Betty's curiosity about love only grew. She began attending parties and youth gatherings more frequently, eager to meet new people and feel that thrill of attention and affection.

It was during one of these gatherings that she met Alain, a boy from a neighboring town and also her classmate in previous years,He was polite, handsome, and seemed genuinely interested in her dreams and ambitions.

"Why are you always so serious, Betty?" Alain asked one evening, as they walked under the streetlights after a small concert. "You deserve to enjoy yourself. Life is short. Don't waste it worrying all the time."

Betty laughed, feeling a warmth in her chest she hadn't felt in years. "I suppose you're right. I've been so focused on school for so long. Maybe I need to experience something… new."

This time, she thought she was wiser, more cautious. She told herself she would be careful, that she would protect her heart and body. But as weeks passed, the relationship grew closer, and with that closeness came risky decisions. She trusted Alain, believing that love itself would shield her from harm.

Soon after, Betty found herself involved with two more boys she met through friends and made sex with both two. Each one seemed different—each one seemed special—but the consequences of her choices slowly began to accumulate. Minor

health issues appeared, emotional strain weighed heavily on her mind, and she noticed a subtle emptiness that no flirtation or romance could fill.

Her friend, Solange, noticed the change. “Betty, you’re not the same anymore,” Solange said one afternoon while they sat in a small café. “You seem anxious, tired, and… I don’t know… different. Are you okay?”

Betty smiled weakly. “I’m fine. I’m just… exploring life, I guess.”

Solange leaned closer, her voice firm but gentle. “Life isn’t something to explore carelessly. You’ve worked so hard for so long. Don’t throw it away chasing fleeting feelings. Some things… some people, aren’t worth it.”

Betty nodded but didn’t listen. She believed she was in control. She was convinced that the freedom she had earned after school allowed her to make mistakes without consequences.

It wasn’t long before reality caught up. One day, feeling unwell and unusually fatigued, Betty visited a health clinic. The doctor conducted a series of tests, and her heart sank when he finally spoke.

“Miss Betty, I’m afraid you’ve tested positive for HIV.”

The words echoed in her mind like a hammer striking steel. She sat frozen, unable to speak, unable to comprehend how her life had come to this. Fourteen years of schooling, countless sacrifices, dreams of a bright future—all threatened by decisions she had made in a few months of impulsive curiosity.

At home, Betty retreated to her room, tears streaming down her face. She thought of her family, her friends, and the life she had imagined. She had believed love was a game, a thrill, a way to feel alive. Now, she understood that it was a responsibility—a force that demanded wisdom, care, and respect for oneself and others.

Weeks passed. Betty began speaking with a counselor and joined a support group for young people affected by HIV. Slowly, she started to confront her reality, facing the consequences of her choices with courage and honesty.

Through these conversations, she realized that her story was not just about her—it was about countless young people who might be walking the same dangerous path. She resolved to share her experience openly, to teach others what she had learned the hardest way possible.

At a local youth center, she spoke for the first time, her voice trembling but determined:

"Love is not just about excitement or attention. It is not something to rush into blindly. Every choice you make has consequences, and some consequences can last a lifetime. Protect yourselves, respect yourselves, and think carefully before giving your heart and body to someone. Learn from my mistakes, so you do not have to learn the hard way."

Her words resonated with the audience, and for the first time in months, Betty felt a sense of purpose. Her life had changed, but it could still serve a greater good. She could not undo the past, but she could illuminate the path for others, warning them of the dangers she had faced.

As months turned into years, Betty continued her advocacy. She became known as a voice of caution and guidance, helping young people navigate the confusing world of love, relationships, and personal responsibility. Though her story began with tragedy, it grew into a legacy—a lesson that young boys and girls would remember long after they had left school.

Betty had lost some of the innocence and freedom she had imagined, but she had gained something far more valuable: wisdom, resilience, and the power to protect others from the mistakes that had almost cost her life.

Love is beautiful, but it is dangerous when rushed or taken lightly. Every choice you make carries consequences. Protect yourselves, respect yourselves, and think carefully before giving your heart and body to someone. Learn from my mistakes, so you do not have to learn the hard way."

Her words resonated deeply with her audience. Boys and girls listened intently, some nodding with tears in their eyes. For the first time in months, Amina felt

purpose and hope. Her story, though painful, could prevent others from walking the same path she had taken.

Over time, Betty became known as a voice of caution and guidance in her community. She shared not only the dangers of unprotected relationships but also the importance of self-respect, education, and patience. Though her own life had been altered forever, she had gained a new mission: helping others avoid the mistakes that had almost cost her everything.

Through her story, young people learned that love, while a natural and beautiful part of life, demands maturity and awareness. Amina’s life had been a cautionary tale, but it also became a beacon of hope—showing that even when life takes a difficult turn, wisdom, courage, and purpose can grow from the pain.

Betty's journey was one marked by ambition, innocence, temptation, and painful lessons. She began as a girl full of dreams, shaped by fourteen years of hard work and discipline, yet undone by a few months of careless freedom. The choices she made after secondary school could not be reversed, but the wisdom she gained became her most valuable gift.

She learned that love, in its purest form, is not about chasing thrills or collecting fleeting moments—it is about respect, responsibility, and patience. She came to understand that the excitement of the present must never outweigh the value of the future.

Though her diagnosis changed the course of her life, it did not end her purpose. Betty used her voice to guide others, to stand before the youth and remind them that freedom is not the absence of rules, but the presence of wisdom. Her pain became a warning, and her story became a shield for those who would listen.

In the end, Betty's’s legacy was not one of regret alone—it was a legacy of transformation. She showed that even when mistakes seem to take everything from you, you still have the power to turn your story into light for others. And that light, once shared, never truly fades.

These all two girls have ever been the students like you or like me,they well all intelligent in class but their future was tarnished by the wrong path that they decided to follow,they could all have waited for their really loves but because high school blood they couldn't.

“Your future is built by the choices you make today—guard it with wisdom, or watch it fade in regret.”

# Chapter two:THE TASTE OF ADOLESCENCE

The beginning of the Year 2021-2022 in which I found myself in secondary three is the year when the Clock Changed.

When I reached the twilight of Secondary Two, watching the get of secondary three I felt like a man who had just stepped out of a fierce storm into calmer waters. I had wrestled myself free from the snares of peer pressure — a malignant vine that had once tightened around me with suffocating persistence. The days of slipping out of school under dubious pretexts, of trading the rustle of notebook pages for the meaningless chatter of street corners, had been cast behind me. Yet, no sooner had I begun to inhale the air of liberation than an unfamiliar cloud gathered over the horizon — not in my personal life this time, but across the entire nation, indeed, the entire globe.

It began with murmurs. Strange reports on the radio, distant and muffled at first. A city far away, whose name I had hardly heard before, was in the grip of a contagion — an invisible adversary whose reach defied borders. At first, it seemed too remote to trouble our routines. But like a shadow stretching under a sinking sun, the disease advanced, consuming distances with an eerie inevitability. By the time I sat my final exams for Secondary Two, “COVID-19” was no longer an obscure term from foreign news; it had become the refrain of every conversation, the unseen intruder in every household.

Then came the closures. Schools, businesses, markets — the very arteries of our society — were halted. For the first time in my life, I experienced the unsettling stillness of an empty classroom not because of a holiday, but because the government commanded it so. The rhythm of education, which I had always taken for granted, fractured. No longer would the academic year begin with the familiar dawn of January; the Ministry of Education decreed that schools would henceforth start in September.

It was a strange thing, to have the calendar rewritten by a disease. The months between my last day of Secondary Two and the first day of Secondary Three felt like an endless intermission in a theatre, the curtain drawn but the drama of life still raging behind it. We were all spectators of uncertainty, waiting to see what shape the future would take when the curtain finally lifted.

When September came, my parents made a decision that startled me. I would not be returning to my former school. In its place, I was to be enrolled in an institution whose name carried an almost austere prestige. My father said, in his firm yet measured tone, that a change of environment was essential for my continued progress — that the soil in which a plant grows determines the quality of its fruit. I understood the metaphor, even if part of me felt reluctant to leave behind the familiar walls where my redemption had begun.

The morning I first stepped into my new school is etched in my memory with the clarity of a painting. The gates were tall and severe, their iron bars painted a green so dark it almost looked black. The school compound stretched beyond them like a disciplined world unto itself. The buildings stood in orderly lines, their walls freshly painted, their windows gleaming in the early sun. Every inch of the place radiated an unspoken expectation: here, mediocrity had no refuge.

The students moved with a quiet urgency, their uniforms crisp, their shoes polished to a dull gleam none of them seemed to be clazy like my past f friends. I noticed there was no idle lingering at corners, no casual tossing of stones across the yard — behaviours that had been so common in my previous school. Here, even leisure seemed to have structure, as though time itself walked in measured steps.

My first days were cautious ones. I kept my words few, my eyes attentive. I knew too well the dangers of careless association, and I resolved that I would not be seduced again by the easy camaraderie of aimless peers. Yet, the mind is a curious archivist — it stores even the moments one wishes to forget. Sometimes, while poring over a textbook in the silent study hall, I would suddenly recall the sound of my old friends' laughter as we fled the school compound, hearts pounding with the thrill of our mischief. Those memories were like old scars — they no longer bled, but they could still ache in the right weather.

It was during those first weeks that I found myself in the company of three students whose presence would prove to be an anchor rather than an anchor-chain. There was Eliah, quiet yet astonishingly perceptive, whose questions in class often revealed a mind that probed far beyond the surface of things. Jonas, tall and deliberate in speech, possessed a humour that was as sharp as it was harmless, making even the most tedious lessons bearable. And Michael, whose boundless energy seemed at first a distraction, but whose academic discipline revealed itself in the way he devoured books on every subject.

We gravitated toward each other not out of necessity, but out of mutual recognition. They saw in me a hunger for redemption; I saw in them the stability I craved. We studied together in the evenings after the day shift, exchanging notes, quizzing one another, and sharing the quiet satisfaction of small victories — a correct answer here, a solved equation there. Unlike my old companions, these friends did not pull me toward the fringes of responsibility; they drew me inward, toward the steady core of self-discipline.

Yet, even as my academic life settled into this new rhythm, there was another transformation taking place — one that had nothing to do with textbooks or timetables. Secondary Three marked the threshold of my adolescence. My voice deepened; my thoughts grew more intricate. I noticed, as if for the first time, the subtleties in people's expressions, the unspoken currents in conversations. And, inevitably, I noticed the presence of girls in a way I had not before.

There was one in particular — a girl whose beauty seemed to defy description. She was in my class, and every time she spoke, her voice carried a warmth that could have melted the most guarded heart. It would have been easy, perhaps even expected, to let myself drift toward her orbit. Many boys of my age would have considered it a rite of passage to chase such a dream.

But I resisted. Not out of coldness, but out of a deliberate choice. I understood that adolescence, for many, was a time of dangerous experiments, of priorities scattered by the winds of emotion. For me, it was different. I had clawed my way out of the pit of distraction once before; I had no intention of tumbling back into it. My gaze, though not blind to her charm, remained fixed on the pages of my books, the lessons on the blackboard, the path I had set for myself.

Still, there was a quiet power in knowing that I could choose — that the boy who had once been led astray by the wrong company could now stand his ground in the presence of temptation. And so I walked through the opening months of Secondary Three with my friends by my side, my goals in clear view, and the faint but steady conviction that this time, I would not falter. In few back days I had already experience school life at the end of term one I was forth positioned in my class which I was proud of and moved on until the coming of the second term.

It was in the second term of my Secondary Three when something happened that I will never forget. The afternoon sun was bright, and its warm light covered the dusty road I used to walk from school to my home. My bag felt light, and my mind was full of thoughts about the lessons of the day. As I walked, I noticed a

figure ahead of me.

In a single moment, I felt like I had traveled back in time to my Primary Six days. The person ahead was someone I had known very well — Clarisse Uwimana. Back then, she was one of the brightest pupils in our class. She always took the second position in exams, and it seemed so easy for her. She answered questions with confidence, and even the teachers admired her sharp mind.

Her Past Brilliance:

Clarisse was also very beautiful. She had shining eyes and a gentle smile that made her stand out in any group. Her hair was always neatly made, her school uniform clean and well ironed, and her books always covered with care. Her parents loved her very much and gave her the best they could. They wanted her to have everything that could help her succeed in life.

At that time, it was hard to imagine her life going in the wrong direction. Everyone believed she would have a bright future — maybe become a doctor, an engineer, or a leader in the community. To me, she was an example of hard work and discipline.

As I got closer to the figure on the road, my heart beat faster. Then I saw clearly — it was Clarisse. But something was different. On her back, tied with a colorful kitenge, was a small baby, maybe just a few months old. She was still beautiful, but I could see she was tired. Her face no longer had the same light it used to have when we were in school together.

We greeted each other. Her voice was still warm and familiar, but I could hear sadness hidden in it. I wanted to ask her how she had reached this point, but I didn’t. Questions filled my mind: What had happened to her dreams? Had something gone wrong at home? Or had she made a choice that changed everything?

I continued walking home, but I couldn’t stop thinking about her. I realized that life can change in ways we don’t expect. Being intelligent, beautiful, and having supportive parents doesn’t always guarantee success. The world is full of surprises — some good, some bad — and no one truly knows where life will take them.

I didn’t judge Clarisse, because I didn’t know the full story. But seeing her that day taught me an important lesson. I decided to work harder on my own goals, to stay away from mistakes that could destroy my future, and to remain focused no matter what.

Clarisse had once been an example of success in my life, but now she was also a reminder to be careful. Her story showed me that the path we take in life can change at any moment, so we must walk it with wisdom and discipline.

As Term Two drew to a close, I found myself quietly proud yet humbled. I had secured the third position in class—a testament not only to my determination but also to the unwavering support from my circle of friends. Eric, Joel, Moses, Michael, and Esther had been my pillars throughout, each of them bringing strengths and encouragement that pushed me forward even on the hardest days.

Our study sessions were more than just about books and notes; they were moments of shared resolve. We huddled together under the shade of the old mango tree near the schoolyard, quizzing one another, explaining difficult concepts, and sometimes simply reminding each other why we couldn’t afford to give up. Moses, ever the optimist, would crack jokes to ease the tension, while Esther’s quiet focus kept us grounded. Eric had a way of breaking down complicated problems, and Joel's discipline was contagious.

Despite the pressures, we forged a brotherhood and sisterhood that transcended the classroom walls. Each of us understood the stakes—soon, the National Exam for Secondary Three would test all our years of effort. It loomed ahead like a mountain, immense and intimidating, yet inviting.

In the days following Term Two’s end, the school buzzed with nervous energy. Whispers of preparation tips, reminders from teachers, and silent prayers filled the air. I often caught myself staring at the calendar, counting down the days until the exam would begin. The weight of expectation was heavier than ever.

At times, I wondered if I was truly ready. The pressure was not just academic; it was emotional. Each one of us carried hopes—not only our own but those of our families, our teachers, and even our communities. The path to success seemed fraught with obstacles, but in my friends, I found both courage and comfort.

Amid the study sessions and exam preparations, an unexpected shadow darkened our school. Mrs. Niyonsaba, our beloved Biology teacher, fell ill. She was more than a teacher to us; she was a mentor, a friend, and a guiding light.

Her lessons were alive with passion. She had a rare gift of making even the most complicated topics understandable and exciting. We adored her gentle patience and the way she encouraged us to ask questions and think critically.

As days turned into weeks, rumors spread about her health worsening. The news hit us hard when the school announced her passing due to a disease that had silently taken hold. The entire school mourned. Students and teachers alike gathered to share memories and tears. Her absence left a hollow space in our hearts and classrooms.

After few days we started to realize the impacts Mrs. Niyonsaba's death was a harsh reminder of life's fragility. In our adolescent years—when everything feels both urgent and uncertain—we were confronted with loss and grief. It deepened our resolve to honor her legacy by giving our best in school and life.

The sorrow united us even more, especially my friends and me. We found strength in each other, sharing not only academic support but also the comfort needed to heal. Her belief in us became a silent promise that we carried forward into the challenging days ahead.

After the sorrow of losing Mrs. Niyonsaba, the school slowly returned to its usual rhythm, but something had changed within us. The coming National Exam was no longer just a test; it was a tribute to her dedication and faith in us. Every lesson felt more precious, every moment of study more urgent.

Eric, Joel, Moses, Esther, and I made a pact — to face the exam together, to push each other beyond limits, and to hold firm in the face of fear and doubt. We spent long hours revising, dissecting past papers, and sharing strategies. Sometimes exhaustion threatened to break us, but our shared resolve became an unspoken source of power.

Nights were the hardest. My mind would replay lessons, formulas, and English vocabulary, tangled with the worries about failure. Would I remember everything? Could I meet the expectations of my family? Of the teachers who believed in me?

One evening, Esther surprised us all by organizing a small study group under the mango tree. She brought snacks, and for a few hours, laughter mixed with serious work. It was a reminder that even in pressure, moments of joy and friendship could exist.

Walking home one day, I paused under the shade of a large tree and thought about how far we had come. From struggling freshmen to students on the edge of a crucial exam, the journey was not easy. Yet, I felt ready — not because I was perfect, but because I was supported by friends who believed in me and a memory of a teacher who showed me what dedication looked like.

As the days melted into weeks, my friendship with Eric, Joel, Moses, and Esther grew stronger. We were no longer just classmates or study partners — we became a small family bound by a shared dream and determination. Each one of us had strengths that filled the gaps in the others' knowledge. Eric's calm explanations made even the most difficult math problems clearer, while Joel's rigorous discipline pushed us to review topics repeatedly. Moses, with his endless optimism, kept the group's spirit high, especially when doubts crept in. Esther, quiet but fiercely focused, reminded us all to balance hard work with moments of rest.

Together, we crafted study schedules and held each other accountable. If one of us was weak in a subject, the others would pitch in to help. Our after-school sessions often stretched into the late evening under the flickering glow of a single bulb, the cool night air filled with the scratch of pencils and whispered questions. These moments were tough but rewarding, as they forged not only knowledge but unbreakable trust.

However, beneath the camaraderie, pressure simmered. The National Exam was not just a school test — it was the gateway to our futures. Success meant

opportunities; failure, a harsh dead-end. This weight sometimes clouded my thoughts, making sleep restless and my heart heavy.

There were moments I doubted myself, wondering if I could truly rise to the challenge. At times, I felt the pang of loneliness despite being surrounded by friends, as the responsibility I carried felt deeply personal. Still, the memory of Mrs. Niyonsaba, her belief in each of us, pushed me to stand firm.

One particular evening stands out vividly. We gathered at Moses's small home, its humble walls illuminated by a single candle. As we reviewed a difficult biology topic, Moses suddenly paused and shared a story from his childhood — how his parents struggled but always encouraged him to study hard. One by one, we each opened up, sharing our fears, hopes, and reasons for pushing forward.

That night, the exam became more than a test of knowledge; it was a symbol of our hopes and sacrifices. We promised to lift each other up no matter what. This unspoken vow carried us through the final weeks of preparation.

As the National Exam approached, I was not only battling textbooks and past papers, but also the stormy currents of adolescence. This was a time when emotions ran high, and the world seemed both exciting and confusing. Many of my peers were caught up in distractions—some chased fleeting romances, others lost themselves in reckless adventures. But I was determined to stay different.

My mind often wrestled with the restlessness that marked this stage of life. I saw friends drawn to girls and boys, experimenting with things I could not yet understand or did not want to be part of. Peer pressure was relentless, whispering temptations that promised belonging but risked derailment. I remember how easy it would have been to fall into that trap, especially when I felt the natural urges of youth pulling at me.

Yet, I found strength in my circle of friends and in my own resolve. I reminded myself of the dreams I held—the hope of a better future that could only be reached through discipline and focus. It wasn't that I rejected the normal experience of adolescence, but I chose to channel that energy into learning, pushing past

confusion and doubt.

One afternoon, a group of classmates invited me to join them at a nearby café—there were drinks, music, and laughter. It was a tempting offer, a break from endless studying. I hesitated, feeling the pull of curiosity and the desire to fit in. But then I thought of my goals, of my friends waiting to study with me, and the legacy of Mrs. Niyonsaba whose dedication inspired me.

I declined politely, choosing instead to return to my books. That decision, small as it seemed, became a defining moment in my adolescence. It was a choice to prioritize my future over fleeting pleasures, to walk a path less traveled but more rewarding in the long run.

In those challenging months, the support from Eric, Joel, Moses, and Esther was crucial. We were each other's anchors amid the turbulence of youth. When doubts gnawed at my confidence or loneliness crept in, a simple conversation or shared laugh with them renewed my spirit. We kept reminding one another why we endured the struggle—the promise of growth, opportunity, and respect.

Together, we learned that adolescence was not just a time of temptation but also a time of choice. The paths we took now would shape the rest of our lives. And though the journey was fraught with challenges, I was thankful to walk it with friends who understood and shared my vision.

Five Days to the National Exam

The countdown had reached its final stretch — only five days remained before the National Exam. The air was thick with tension and anticipation. Every moment felt precious, every lesson a chance to sharpen my mind for the challenge ahead.

Eric, Joel, Moses, Esther, and I gathered once again beneath the familiar mango tree, our makeshift study spot. The cool breeze whispered through the leaves as we spread out our notes, past papers, and textbooks. This was our last serious revision — a final push to reinforce everything we had learned over the years.

Our conversations were focused but warm. We quizzed each other, debated tricky questions, and shared tips. Sometimes, when fatigue threatened to dull our minds, Moses would lighten the mood with a joke or a funny story, reminding us to breathe and stay positive. Esther kept us grounded, making sure we took short breaks and ate well. Eric and Joel maintained their usual steady focus, encouraging us all to push beyond the exhaustion.

But outside our circle of determination, not everyone believed I belonged at this point. Many who knew me before were stunned when they heard I was preparing to take the National Exam.

Some whispered doubts behind my back, their skepticism thinly veiled by surprise. “Saint? Taking the national exam? I never thought he’d make it this far,” they said. Others openly expressed disbelief, expecting me to have fallen behind like so many others who had once shared my beginnings.

I heard their words, but I refused to let them weigh me down. Instead, I let their doubt fuel my determination. Their surprise was a quiet victory — proof that I had defied expectations and proven wrong the naysayers.

Inner Reflections

Sitting under that mango tree with my friends, I thought about the journey. From the struggles of Secondary One and Two, the temptations of adolescence, to the loss of our beloved Mrs. Niyonsaba, and the long hours of study — everything had led me here.

The exam was more than just a test of knowledge; it was a test of character. It was about proving to myself that discipline, support, and focus could overcome the odds. And as I looked around at my friends’ determined faces, I knew we were ready to face whatever came next — together.

The First Day of the National Exam

The morning air was crisp and still as I entered the exam hall. My satchel felt unusually heavy, but it wasn't from the weight of my books. It was the burden of anticipation pressing down on my chest. I found my way to the very first desk in the front row, where the light streamed clearly through the window and the atmosphere felt strangely solemn. Around me, other candidates were settling in, some whispering nervously, others staring at the blank exam papers that awaited us.

For nearly thirty minutes, I sat quietly, my heart pounding with an intensity I had never felt before. The silence was broken only by the faint rustle of paper and the occasional cough from a student. My breaths came quick, shallow — as if the very air had thickened with tension. The weight of the moment wrapped around me, making time both crawl and rush all at once.

Then, the door opened slowly, and in walked a man I had never seen before. He was older, his hair streaked with gray, dressed neatly in a dark coat and wearing spectacles that gleamed under the fluorescent lights. His presence commanded attention; there was a calm authority in his stride. He announced, "Good morning, students. I am your exam supervisor for this session. Please be prepared — the exam will begin shortly."

A wave of nervous energy swept through the room as he spoke. The teachers who usually guided us through lessons had been replaced by new faces, strangers with sharp eyes and no familiar warmth. The presence of these invigilators, strangers to us, made the reality of the National Exam all the more intimidating. It was no longer just a school test; this was the real deal, the ultimate assessment that could change our lives.

The room itself felt transformed. What was once a lively classroom now resembled a place of solemn challenge. The walls seemed closer, the desks sharper, the silence heavier. The familiar chalkboards were replaced with sterile whiteboards, and the usual comforting hum of school life had given way to a pressing quiet, broken only by the occasional rustling of papers.

I looked around, noticing the faces of other students — some calm, some pale with anxiety, others biting their lips in concentration. I wondered if they shared my fears or if I was alone in the storm raging within me.

The clock ticked steadily, a harsh reminder that the moment was here. I tried to steady my breathing, but my hands trembled slightly as I opened the exam booklet.

The first paper was Mathematics — a subject I both loved and feared. The syllabus was broad, and deep within me lurked a particular dread: the dreaded Statistics section. Numbers and formulas danced in my mind like shadows, some familiar, others blurred by doubt.

As I scanned the questions, my heart skipped. There it was — a statistics problem staring at me from the page. My palms grew sweaty. I remembered the many hours I had spent with Eric and Joel practicing statistics, but still, a knot of uncertainty tightened in my stomach. What if I failed this section? What if all my effort crumbled here?

I took a deep breath, recalling the words of Mrs. Niyonsaba about staying calm and breaking problems into smaller parts. Slowly, I began working through the questions, careful not to rush, trying to piece together the puzzle before me.

Despite the fear, I pushed myself to focus. Each formula I remembered, every method practiced, became a stepping stone out of the anxiety. I paused, closed my eyes briefly, then reopened them with renewed resolve.

Time was relentless, and I could feel the pressure mounting as minutes slipped away. Yet, I kept working steadily, block by block, step by step. My friends' faces flashed in my mind — their support, their belief in me. This wasn't just my battle; it was ours.

When the bell finally rang, signaling the end of the exam, I felt a mix of relief and exhaustion. I wasn't sure how well I had done, but I knew I had given my best despite the fear.

The Second Day: Biology Exam

The following morning arrived with a slightly lighter air, as if the first day's tension had loosened its grip just a little. Still, my nerves were taut beneath the

surface as I made my way back to the exam hall. Today's test was Biology, a subject that, unlike Mathematics, I felt somewhat comfortable with.

Sitting again at my usual spot—the first desk near the window—I reviewed my notes quietly before the exam began. Biology had always fascinated me: the study of life, the complexity of cells, the miracle of ecosystems. I had spent many hours revising diagrams, memorizing classifications, and understanding processes. Mrs. Niyonsaba's passionate lessons had left a lasting impression, and I carried her teachings with me as a source of encouragement.

The invigilator, the same composed man from the previous day, entered the room and reminded us of the exam rules. His calm voice steadied my nerves, and I felt a sense of readiness settling in.

As the paper was distributed, I immediately scanned the questions. The paper was challenging but within my grasp. There were questions on cell structures, human anatomy, and plant physiology. One diagram asked us to label parts of the human heart—a topic I had practiced repeatedly with Esther during our study sessions.

I worked through the paper methodically, careful to read each question fully before answering. The familiarity of the content allowed me to regain confidence, pushing aside the shadows of doubt that had hovered during the math exam.

One section required us to explain processes like photosynthesis and respiration. I took a deep breath and wrote clearly, recalling every detail I had learned. The complexity of life, laid bare on the page, inspired a sense of awe even amidst the exam's pressure.

Although I was doing well, I reminded myself not to become complacent. The National Exam demanded precision and accuracy; small mistakes could cost valuable points. I double-checked my answers whenever time allowed, ensuring clarity and completeness.

The clock moved steadily, and I felt time slipping away faster than I wished. Yet, the familiar knowledge in the questions helped me maintain a steady pace.

When the invigilator finally announced the end of the exam, a wave of relief and quiet satisfaction washed over me.

Leaving the hall that day, I felt a renewed sense of hope. Biology had been a challenge I was able to meet with confidence, and that success bolstered my spirit for the remaining exams to come.

The Remaining Days of the National Exam

After the relief of completing the Biology exam, the days that followed were a whirlwind of tests, emotions, and endurance. Each morning, I found myself returning to the exam hall, facing different subjects that tested various parts of my knowledge and willpower.

Kinyarwanda

The Kinyarwanda exam was one I approached with cautious confidence. Language had always been a strong suit, especially because I had spent years immersed in our culture and oral traditions. The paper included comprehension passages, grammar exercises, and an essay.

The essay topic challenged us to reflect on the importance of unity in our community — a theme that resonated deeply. I took my time to write clearly and thoughtfully, drawing from what I had learned both inside and outside the classroom.

Though the grammar section was tricky, especially the verb conjugations, I felt I managed well. When the invigilator announced the end, I breathed a small sigh of relief. The exam was demanding but fair, and I hoped my preparation would reflect in the results.

Chemistry

Next came Chemistry — a subject that had always been a mixed bag for me. Some concepts, like the periodic table and chemical reactions, were easier to grasp, while others, such as equations and balancing formulas, often left me puzzled.

The exam paper was divided into theory and practical questions. The theory tested our understanding of atomic structures, chemical bonding, and reactions. The practical questions required careful reasoning and calculations.

During the exam, I found some parts challenging, especially the calculations. However, recalling the long hours spent with Moses and Joel helped. We had practiced problems repeatedly, and I forced myself to stay calm and think logically.

Though Chemistry tested my limits, I finished the paper feeling I had done my best.

History

History was one of my favorite subjects — it was like a storybook of our past, filled with lessons and warnings. The exam asked us about Rwanda's journey to independence, the colonial period, and post-independence challenges.

The questions were detailed and required both memorization and analysis. I recalled the many lessons where the teachers emphasized the importance of knowing our history to build a better future.

Writing my answers, I felt a sense of pride in my heritage and a growing sense of responsibility to contribute positively to my country.

Physics

Physics was another challenging test. It was full of problems about motion, forces, energy, and electricity. The paper required calculations and explanations, demanding both theoretical knowledge and practical application.

I struggled at times, especially with questions involving formulas I was less confident about. Yet, I kept going, reminding myself that perseverance was key.

Working through the problems slowly but surely, I aimed to earn as many points as possible. When the exam ended, exhaustion mixed with relief washed

over me.

English

The English exam was a final hurdle. It included comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, and an essay. The essay topic asked us to write about the role of education in shaping one's future — a theme I felt deeply connected to.

I carefully read the comprehension passage and answered the questions, taking care with grammar and vocabulary. Writing the essay, I reflected on my own journey and the sacrifices made to reach this point.

Finishing the paper, I felt a mix of pride and fatigue. The journey had been long and demanding, but I was close to the finish line.

When the final exam was over, a profound silence seemed to settle among us students. The pressure of months of study and weeks of exams lifted, replaced by a strange mixture of relief and uncertainty.

We were free — free to return home, to rest, and to wait for the results that would shape our next steps in life. The vacation was a time for reflection, hope, and quiet anticipation.

Though I knew the wait would be difficult, I took comfort in the knowledge that I had done everything possible to succeed. The support of my friends, the memory of my teachers, and my own determination had carried me through.

The Waiting Game

As the last exam papers were collected and the invigilators left the hall, a strange silence filled the air — one heavier than any test question or classroom lecture. We had given our all, poured months of sweat and sleepless nights into these exams. But now, the outcome was beyond our control.

I walked out of the exam center feeling a whirlwind of emotions: relief, exhaustion, hope... and a shadow of doubt. Had I done enough? Would my efforts

be enough to silence the whispers of those who never believed in me?

The vacation ahead was filled with quiet anticipation. Each day that passed brought me closer to the moment of truth, yet further away from certainty. I could not help but wonder—would all the hard work and sacrifice finally pay off? Or would the results shatter the dreams I had carefully built?

As I looked at the horizon, the future seemed both near and distant, clear and mysterious. This was the moment when everything could change — the moment that would define the path ahead.

The question hung in the air: Would I succeed in the National Exams?

Only time would tell.

# Chapter three: TRIALS OF THE CLASSROOM

The day the National Exam results were announced was one of those moments in life that you feel in your bones long before it arrives. That morning, the whole village seemed to buzz with restless energy. Children ran along the dusty paths carrying rumors of who had passed, who had failed, and whose name was on the coveted lists posted at the sector office. My heart pounded with a rhythm that took me back to the exam hall itself.

When I finally stood before the tall, crowded board, the smell of sweat, dust, and anticipation was overwhelming. I scanned the long columns of names and numbers, my finger trembling as it traced each line. Then… there it was. My name. I had passed. Not with flying colors, not with the kind of score that would turn heads, but I had passed nonetheless. And in that moment, it felt like victory.

To my surprise, the letter next to my name indicated that I had been placed in a boarding school. I imagined myself walking in a neat uniform among students from across the country, the air filled with a mix of languages and ambition. But reality, as always, had its way of grounding dreams.

When I handed the placement paper to my parents, their faces told two very different stories. My father's eyes lit up with cautious pride, but my mother's brows knitted together in worry. I didn't need to ask why. Money. We had enough for the basics, but boarding school was an expense that could drain the little we had.

That evening, the small sitting room became a quiet battleground. My father argued that I should join a TVET school, learning a trade that could quickly bring income. My mother, on the other hand, insisted on keeping me in general education.

> "A mind that keeps learning," she said firmly, "can build a future that no one can take away."

I sat silently between them, feeling like the ball in a game I didn't sign up to play. Days passed, and so did the arguments. Sometimes my mother's voice was the only one I heard; other times my father's reasoning felt unshakable. But in the end, my mother's persistence prevailed. She wanted me to finish my studies in general education, no matter the sacrifices it would require.

A week later, I found myself standing at the gates of a new day school, my old books tucked under my arm, my mind full of questions. I didn't know it then, but this school would shape not only my knowledge, but also my character in ways I could never have imagined.

When I reached the tall, green-painted gate of G.S. Kacyiru II, I stood still for about ten minutes, simply taking in the sight before me. This was not just a school — it was like stepping into a place where discipline, beauty, and order lived together. The air smelled fresh, touched by the sweetness of blooming flowers.

From where I stood, the first thing that caught my eye was the garden just inside the gate. The grass was cut so evenly it looked like a soft green carpet. Rows of bright flowers lined the walkway — roses, marigolds, and hibiscus — their petals glowing in the morning sun. The small white stones that bordered each flowerbed were placed with such care that they formed a perfect frame.

Beyond the gardens, the cream-colored school buildings stood proudly, connected by open corridors. I could see students moving about in small groups, chatting and laughing. None of them were familiar — every student was new in my eyes.

I tightened my grip on my bag and began walking toward the administrative block. The sound of my own footsteps on the neat pavement reminded me that this was my first day in an entirely new chapter of my life.

At the end of the path was a polished wooden door with a brass nameplate that read: Head Mistress. This was the office where I had to register myself.

I took a deep breath, knocked gently, and heard a calm but confident voice from inside say, "Come in."

I opened the door and stepped into one of the cleanest offices I had ever seen. The floor shone as though it had been polished just moments ago. In the center stood a large desk, its surface spotless except for a few neatly arranged files and a pen holder. A tall bookshelf stood against the wall, filled with carefully labeled folders. On the windowsill sat a small potted plant, its green leaves glossy and alive.

Behind the desk sat the Head Mistress — a woman whose presence commanded respect. She wore a deep-blue skirt suit that fit her perfectly, with a crisp white blouse beneath. A silver necklace rested around her neck, catching a soft glint of light. Her hair was neatly braided back, and a pair of thin-framed glasses rested on her nose.

She looked up from the papers in front of her, her sharp but kind eyes meeting mine.

“Good morning,” she said warmly.

“Good morning, madam,” I replied.

She gestured toward the chair opposite her. “Please, have a seat.”

I sat down carefully, noticing how her desk had not a single sheet of paper out of place. The faint scent of furniture polish filled the room, and the quiet ticking of a clock on the wall seemed to match the calm in her voice.

“You are here to register?” she asked, picking up a pen.

“Yes, madam,” I answered.

She began filling out my details with beautiful, steady handwriting. Each letter she wrote seemed deliberate, as though she believed that even registration forms deserved respect. Then, she raised her eyes and asked,

“What is your favorite combination?”

Without hesitation, I answered, “MCE — Mathematics, Computer, and Economics.”

She stopped writing for a moment, then slowly reached for my result slip. After scanning it carefully, she adjusted her glasses and said, “Are you sure you have thought this through? I see you scored very few marks in both mathematics and physics. This combination might be challenging for you.”

Her words hit me like a soft warning. I nodded slowly, not because I had changed my mind immediately, but because I understood she was speaking from experience.

Finally, she closed the file and said, “Alright. For now, take this registration form to the bank and pay your school fees. But on the way, think carefully about whether MCE is truly the right choice for you. If not, you might consider the other option we offer here — Languages.”

I left her office with the form in my hand. As I walked toward the bank, my steps were slow. The morning sun felt warmer now, and my mind was racing. Was MCE really my future? Or was I forcing myself into something that didn’t match my strengths? I knew that if I didn’t choose MCE, my path would lead me to study Languages instead — the only other combination this school offered.

The question stayed with me all the way to the bank, weighing heavier than the money I carried in my pocket.

The bank wasn’t far from the school, but every step I took on that short journey felt like a debate between my heart and my head. The morning breeze rustled the leaves of the jacaranda trees that lined the road, their purple blossoms scattering along the pavement like nature’s confetti. I walked slowly, the sound of passing motorcycles fading in and out as I thought deeply.

Mathematics, Computer, Economics.

It sounded modern, powerful — a combination for ambitious students who wanted to work in technology, finance, or big companies. That’s why I had chosen it in the first place. But the head mistress’s words echoed in my mind: “You scored very few marks in mathematics and physics. This combination might be challenging for you.”

She was right. I remembered the hours I had spent staring at numbers that refused to make sense, and the frustration of watching my friends breeze through equations while I struggled. Was I about to set myself up for years of stress just to carry a title that didn't suit me?

By the time I reached the bank, my mind was tilting toward another path. I went through the motions — standing in line, handing over the money, collecting my stamped receipt — but inside, I knew something had shifted.

On the walk back, the name of the other combination whispered to me like a soft promise: Languages.

It wasn't a subject that made my head ache. In fact, I had always enjoyed writing essays, reading stories, and learning how different cultures spoke and thought. Literature could transport me into worlds I had never seen. French carried a musical rhythm, and Kinyarwanda was the heart of my identity. By the time the school gate came into view again, my decision was final — MCE had disappeared from my thoughts, replaced completely by the certainty of Languages.

I climbed the short steps to the administrative block and stopped in front of the Head Mistress's door again. The polished wood looked the same, but I felt different this time. I knocked, my knuckles making a soft, confident sound.

"Come in," came her voice once more.

I opened the door and stepped into the same clean, neatly arranged office. The scent of polish and the quiet ticking of the clock were unchanged, but the expression on my face told her something was new. She looked up from her papers, pen still in hand.

"Oh, you're back already," she said with a hint of curiosity. "Have you paid the fees?"

"Yes, madam," I replied, holding out the stamped receipt. She glanced at it, nodded, and then tilted her head slightly.

"So… are you still preferring MCE?"

I took a small breath. “No, madam. I have decided to take Languages.”

Her lips curved into a faint, approving smile — not a wide grin, but the kind of smile that said she respected my choice. Without another word, she reached into her desk drawer and pulled out a small piece of stiff paper. She wrote in neat capital letters: THE NEW COMER.

“This,” she said, sliding the paper toward me, “is for your class teacher. Keep it safe until you meet her.”

I nodded and took the paper carefully, as though it was a key to my new identity.

“Come,” she said, standing up. The chair made a soft sound against the polished floor as she pushed it back. She smoothed her skirt, adjusted her necklace, and walked around the desk toward the door.

I followed her out of the office, the sunlight from the courtyard making me blink for a moment. She walked with a steady pace, her shoes making crisp clicks on the stone pathway. As we moved through the school grounds, I took in details I hadn’t noticed earlier: the tall mango tree beside the library, its branches heavy with green fruit; the row of benches shaded by flowering bougainvillea; the faint hum of a computer lab we passed, its windows slightly open.

We turned down a corridor where the sound of distant laughter grew louder. Students were changing classes, their footsteps echoing off the walls. The Head Mistress led me past several doors with wooden nameplates — S4 MCE,S5 MCE, S5 LFK.

Finally, we stopped in front of a classroom with bold letters above the door: S4 LFK — Literature, French, and Kinyarwanda.

“This is your class,” she said, placing a hand gently on the doorframe.

Through the half-open door, I could see rows of desks neatly arranged, sunlight streaming in through the wide windows. A group of students at the back were leaning toward one another, whispering and laughing. At the front, a tall woman in a colorful kitenge dress was erasing the blackboard with long, practiced strokes.

The Head Mistress turned to me. “Your class teacher is Mrs. Mukamana. Give her the paper, and she will help you settle in.”

I tightened my grip on THE NEW COMER paper, feeling the weight of this moment. The air smelled faintly of chalk dust and fresh flowers drifting in from the open window. My heart beat faster — not from fear, but from the thrill of stepping into a new place where no one knew me yet.

She gave me one last encouraging nod before pushing the door open wider. Every head in the room turned toward us, and for a brief moment, the only sound was the soft thud of my footsteps as I crossed the threshold into S4 LFK — the place where my next story was about to begin.

I stepped into the room, the door clicking shut behind me. The chatter faded as every head turned toward me. I quickly counted — there were only ten students in the class. Ten strangers.

Mrs. Mukamana straightened her back and gave me a warm but expectant smile.

“Come here, please,” she said, motioning toward the front. “Introduce yourself before you take a seat.”

I swallowed hard, the paper in my hand crumpling slightly as I walked to the center of the room. My legs felt heavy, like they weren’t sure whether to carry me forward or run me right back out the door.

“All right,” she said. “Tell your classmates your name, where you’re from, and why you chose Languages.”

That last part was easy enough — I had already decided in my heart that this combination was my path. But the first part… the first part was not.

I started slowly. “My name is…” I gave my full name, trying to keep my voice steady.

“I’m from…” The words felt heavy as they left my mouth. I could see curiosity building in the eyes of my new classmates.

And then came the hardest part: my previous school.

I hesitated. I wasn't proud of it, not because the school was bad, but because I knew what it carried in people's minds — a small place, barely recognized, far from the polished image of schools like G.S Kacyiru II.

Still, I couldn't lie. "I studied at…" I said the name quickly, hoping it would just pass by unnoticed.

But it didn't. The moment the last syllable left my lips, a ripple of laughter broke out in the room. It wasn't just a chuckle — it was the kind of laughter that comes when people feel they know something about you just from a name. My cheeks warmed.

I stood there, forcing a small smile, pretending it didn't matter. Mrs. Mukamana clapped her hands twice to quiet them.

"All right, that's enough," she said firmly. "We welcome new people here, not judge them."

I nodded gratefully in her direction, even though my heart still pounded.

When the room finally settled, she pointed toward the far side.

"You can take that seat — third desk from the back."

I walked down the narrow aisle, passing curious eyes that seemed to follow me all the way. The wooden desk was smooth from years of use, the initials of past students carved into its edges. I sat down slowly, feeling the weight of the moment — the laughter, the introductions, the unspoken first impressions — all mixing into the first page of my life in this new school.

Mrs. Mukamana was the teacher of Entrepreneurship, a subject I had never paid much attention to before. But as she began the lesson, her voice was calm and steady, filled with confidence and experience. She explained the basics clearly — how small businesses worked, the importance of innovation, and the value of hard work.

For two full hours, she guided us through examples, asked questions, and encouraged us to think about our own ideas. The class, though small, was attentive. I found myself slowly drawn into the topic, realizing that entrepreneurship wasn't just about money but about creativity and problem-solving.

When the bell finally rang, signaling the end of the lesson, I felt a strange mix of relief and eagerness. But the school day was far from over.

Almost immediately, the door opened again, and a new figure stepped in. He was a tall, well-dressed man, wearing a crisp suit and polished shoes that clicked against the floor. His tie was perfectly knotted, and his hair neatly combed back.

"Bonjour, class," he greeted us warmly, his French accent clear but gentle.

I wasn't sure what to expect. In the past years, French lessons had been irregular; sometimes the scheduled French hours were used for teaching other subjects, or for study time. I feared that French might be a difficult subject, full of complicated rules and unfamiliar sounds.

But as the man began the lesson, my curiosity grew. He spoke slowly at first, introducing himself and the basics of French greetings. The way he pronounced the words — soft, flowing, musical — was fascinating. I found myself wanting to listen carefully, to learn more.

The class was short — only forty minutes. Before I knew it, the time was up, and the teacher closed his notebook with a smile.

"C'est la pause maintenant," he said — "It is break time now."

As the students gathered their things and moved toward the door, I felt a flicker of excitement. Maybe, just maybe, French wouldn't be as hard as I had thought.

The bell rang sharply, and the classroom doors opened to release us into the warm sunlight of the courtyard. I stepped outside, letting the fresh air wash over me after hours of sitting still. The school grounds were alive with movement — students gathering in groups, chatting, laughing, some playing football on the grassy field beyond the gardens.

I wandered toward a shaded spot under a tall jacaranda tree, its purple flowers swaying gently in the breeze. From a distance, I noticed a small cluster of boys standing near one of the benches, deep in conversation. Their voices carried clearly, and I soon realized they were speaking in English.

English.

The language was both familiar and foreign to me. I had studied it before, of course, but speaking it fluently and confidently was something I had never quite mastered. I had always admired those who could switch effortlessly between Kinyarwanda, French, and English — it felt like they held keys to doors I hadn't yet opened.

Curiosity pulled me closer to the group, but at the same time, fear held me back. What if I said something wrong? What if they laughed at me like the others had earlier? What if I sounded foolish?

Despite the hesitation, I stepped quietly toward them, my footsteps soft against the dusty ground. One of the boys noticed me first.

"Hey," he called out, his voice friendly but curious. "Why are you so quiet?"

I paused, unsure how to respond. My throat felt dry. Then I forced a small smile and said, "I'm just listening."

The boy stepped a little closer, his eyes bright with interest. "Come join us. What's your name?"

I hesitated a moment more, then said, "I'm… Saint."

He nodded approvingly. "Nice name. I'm Eric, and these are Mr lion and Nisasani"

The three of them smiled warmly, and for the first time that day, I felt a bit of the weight on my shoulders lighten. They didn't seem to judge me for my silence or my accent — just curious about the new guy in class.

Nisasanigrinned and asked, “So, Saint, where are you from?”

I swallowed the lump in my throat but answered, “I’m from Kigali.”

Eric laughed softly. “So you must know the city well.”

“I do,” I said, feeling a flicker of pride.

As they continued talking, they included me little by little, asking simple questions and explaining words I didn’t know. Though I still felt shy, I found myself practicing phrases in my head, trying to keep up with the flow.

The break time flew by, and as the bell rang again, signaling the end of recess, I realized I had taken my first real step into this new world — a world where language was a bridge, not a barrier.

When the break time ended, the school bell rang with its sharp metallic chime, pulling us all back from our scattered conversations in the courtyard. I followed my new classmates inside, walking slowly, almost deliberately, as though every step was helping me settle deeper into this unfamiliar world. The air in the classroom felt cooler than outside, the hum of chatter dying down as students slipped into their seats.

I had barely settled into my place on the third desk from the back when the door swung open. In stepped a man whose presence carried both calm authority and warmth. He was tall, his posture perfectly straight, and he dressed in a neatly pressed white shirt tucked into dark trousers, his shoes polished until they reflected the sunlight from the window. His smile was soft but confident, the kind of expression that immediately put you at ease.

“Habari zenu?” he greeted in a deep, pleasant voice, letting the syllables roll with perfect enunciation.

# Chapter four: THE FREE MOMENTS

The year I entered Secondary Four marked a new dawn in my academic journey. It was as if the struggles, the mistakes, and the lessons of my earlier years had finally molded me into a completely different person. In Secondary One, Two, and even part of Three, I had been an ordinary student, sometimes distracted, sometimes carried away by friends and unnecessary things. But in Secondary Four, I rose to a level I had never imagined for myself.

Every single exam that term became an opportunity for me to prove not just to my teachers but also to myself that I was no longer the same boy. I studied with seriousness, revising every evening, asking questions in class, and sitting with friends who wanted to learn rather than waste time. For the first time in my life, I felt what it meant to enjoy learning. Books were no longer a burden; they were like doors leading me to a brighter future.

When the first results were released, my name appeared near the very top of the list: second place out of thirty-eight students. I could hardly believe my eyes. That feeling—of climbing from the ordinary ranks to the very front—was something that cannot be described in simple words. It was a mixture of pride, joy, and also humility, because I knew how far I had come.

By the second term, I had grown even more confident. My teachers began to notice me in ways they never had before. They praised me in the staffroom, they gave my parents good reports during visiting days, and sometimes they even used my progress as an example to encourage other students. The school leaders also began to recognize me. Unlike the past years when I was seen as just another boy trying to find his way, now I was respected as someone who represented the true spirit of the school.

Every morning, I walked into the classroom with a sense of purpose. My notebooks, which in the earlier years had been filled with incomplete notes and careless handwriting, were now neat, organized, and full of determination. I made it a habit to sit at the front of the class, where I could clearly hear the teachers and avoid the distractions of whispers and jokes from the back benches. It was a simple decision, but it changed everything.

During lessons, I raised my hand more often, asking questions when I did not understand. In the past, I had been too shy or sometimes too careless to do this, but now I realized that every unanswered question was a lost opportunity. The teachers began to notice this change. They no longer saw me as the boy who used to struggle quietly; they now saw me as someone eager to grow.

Study sessions became the center of my life. After classes, while some of my classmates rushed outside to play football or chat under the trees, I often chose to stay behind, reviewing the day's lessons. I wasn't against fun — but I had learned that fun without limits steals your future. I balanced my time, but my studies always came first.

The first exams of the year arrived sooner than I expected. Though I had prepared well, the nervousness of facing the examination hall was still there. I remember sitting in the silent room, the sound of pens scratching on paper, the rustle of answer sheets, and the tension hanging in the air. But when I held the paper in my hands, I realized that most of the questions were familiar. They reflected the very topics I had worked so hard on. Confidence grew within me, and I wrote with a steady hand.

When the results came out, my heart raced as the teacher began to call out names, starting from the lowest marks. Finally, when he reached the top, my name was there — second place. Out of thirty-eight students, I was among the very best. That night, I could hardly sleep. It was not because I felt proud in a boastful way, but because I felt something greater: hope. Hope that my life could truly change.

The second term was even more demanding. The teachers gave us harder assignments, preparing us for the reality that Secondary Four was the gateway to advanced studies. Many of my classmates grew weary; some gave up along the way, falling back into laziness. But I pressed forward. I began to wake up earlier than before, sometimes revising my notes at dawn while others were still sleeping. Those quiet morning hours became my secret weapon. The world was silent, and I could hear my own thoughts clearly.

By the end of the year, something extraordinary had happened: I finished either first or second in class. My grades were strong, and they qualified me to join Secondary Five without any problem. But not everyone was as fortunate. Out of the thirty-eight students in my class, twenty were told to repeat Secondary Four because their performance had not met the requirements.

This news did not bring me joy, even though I had succeeded. Instead, it filled me with sadness. Some of those classmates had been my close friends. I had shared notes with them, sat beside them, and laughed with them during breaks. Now, the road was separating us. Only eighteen of us moved on to Secondary Five, while the rest remained behind. Life had drawn a line, and though I wished I could pull everyone forward, I realized there are things beyond our control.

That was when I learned a powerful lesson: in life, each person carries their own destiny. We can walk together, share experiences, and encourage one another, but in the end, it is the choices we make and the effort we put in that shape our future. I had chosen to work hard, and I was reaping the results. Some of my friends had chosen a different path, and now they were facing the consequences.

Another lesson I carried with me was this: success does not taste sweet when others are failing. It is easy to celebrate alone, but true happiness comes when we rise together. Unfortunately, life is not always like that. Sometimes, you must move forward while others stay behind. And the greatest responsibility is to make sure you do not waste the opportunity given to you.

As I prepared to join Secondary Five with the eighteen classmates who had made it through, I promised myself two things: first, that I would continue working hard and never allow distractions to pull me back again; and second, that I would always use my story as a reminder that transformation is possible. If I could change from an ordinary, distracted student in Secondary One, Two, and Three into a top student in Secondary Four, then anyone could change—if only they chose discipline, hard work, and determination.

Secondary Four became the year that truly defined me. It was as though a new spirit had entered my life, guiding me to walk differently, think differently, and even dream differently. I had spent Secondary One, Two, and part of Three stumbling, distracted by friends, peer pressure, and my own immaturity. But as I stepped into Secondary Four, I knew I had no time to waste. The mistakes of the past were behind me, and the future demanded responsibility.

It was during this time that the teachers' respect for me grew even stronger. They began to call me by name in staff meetings, according to what I later learned from one of my friends. They told my parents that their son had changed, that he was no longer the boy of yesterday but a young man with vision. The school

leaders also noticed me. Once, during an assembly, the headmaster pointed me out as an example of how discipline and hard work can transform a student. Standing there as the whole school clapped gave me a feeling I will never forget.

I looked at the faces of those who would not be moving on — some were close friends. I had studied with them, played with them, shared meals with them. Now, the path of life was separating us. I felt pain in my heart, for I knew what it meant to repeat a year. It was not only about time lost but also about the weight of disappointment carried in one's heart.

That night, as I reflected, I understood a truth that has remained with me ever since: life rewards those who take responsibility, and it punishes those who delay. It was not that my friends were less intelligent. Many of them had the same potential as I did. But while I was fighting for my future, some of them were joking away their time. Life does not show mercy in such cases.

Moving on with the eighteen classmates who passed was bittersweet. We were fewer now, but also stronger, for only the determined had survived the challenge. As we prepared for Secondary Five, I carried a promise in my heart: that I would never forget the lessons of Secondary Four. Hard work brings results. Discipline earns respect. And choices shape destinies.

After the long and challenging year of Secondary Four, the vocation was a well-deserved relief. It was a time when the weight of exams and continuous studying finally lifted, allowing my mind and body to rest. Yet, even in relaxation, I could not fully let go of the lessons I had learned. The vocation became a period of reflection — a bridge between the hard work of the past year and the greater challenges that awaited me in Secondary Five.

I spent most of the vocation in calm routines. Each morning, I would wake early, not out of obligation, but out of habit. The discipline that I had built during Secondary Four had become part of me. I would read a few pages from my textbooks or revise important notes for a short while, reminding myself that my success was a continuous process and not a one-time achievement. My parents noticed my diligence and praised me quietly, and I could see a mixture of pride and hope in their eyes.

At the same time, vocation brought joy. I could visit relatives, enjoy family meals, and meet old friends without the pressure of schoolwork. But even in those moments of leisure, I carried the lessons of the past year like a lantern guiding my steps. I had learned that balance was the key: enjoyment without carelessness, relaxation without laziness. I could feel myself becoming more mature, more prepared to face whatever Secondary Five would throw at me.

As the vocation drew to a close, my excitement grew. The new academic year, 2023–2024, was about to begin. I had heard many students and even some teachers say that Secondary Five is the first truly hard year of school. Exams were more demanding, the syllabus was wider, and expectations were higher. Some students approached the year with fear and doubt. But I felt differently. I stepped into this new chapter with confidence and hope, believing that if I had conquered Secondary Four, I could navigate this year as well.

The first day of Secondary Five arrived, bringing with it a mixture of nerves and anticipation. Walking into the classroom, I looked around at my new classmates. Some were familiar faces from Secondary Four, while others were new students from different schools. The classroom buzzed with energy: whispers of excitement, laughter, and the quiet anxiety of those unsure of what awaited them. I found my seat and sat quietly, reflecting on the journey that had brought me here.

In that moment, I felt a profound sense of purpose. I believed, with every fiber of my being, that this year could be perfect — a year to excel, to grow, and to prepare for the final challenges of my high school journey. I reminded myself that obstacles were inevitable, but determination, focus, and a disciplined mind would help me overcome them. I could already see that my efforts would be measured not only by grades but by how I applied the lessons of life I had learned over the past years.

The teachers entered the classroom, each carrying an air of authority and expectation. They greeted us warmly, but it was clear that they had high standards. Their eyes searched the room, noting which students appeared attentive, which seemed confident, and which looked uncertain. I sat straight, attentive, and ready to absorb everything they said. I knew that to succeed in Secondary Five, I would have to approach every lesson with seriousness, every assignment with dedication, and every challenge with courage.

Even on that first day, I could feel a subtle shift in my own mindset. I was no longer the boy who had stumbled through Secondary One, Two, and Three. I was a

student who had learned to harness his strengths, recognize his weaknesses, and use both to his advantage. The year ahead seemed challenging, yes, but it also seemed full of opportunities — opportunities to grow academically, socially, and emotionally.

As the day ended, I walked home with a quiet excitement. I thought about the weeks and months to come, about the exams that would test not only my knowledge but my perseverance. I thought about the friendships I would form, the lessons I would learn, and the personal growth that awaited me. In my heart, I carried a promise to myself: to face every challenge with courage, to remain disciplined even when temptation arose, and to strive for excellence in everything I did.

Looking back on that first day, I realized that hope and belief in oneself are powerful forces. They shape the way we see challenges and influence the choices we make. I was ready to embrace Secondary Five fully, ready to learn, ready to grow, and ready to continue the journey that would eventually lead me to my dreams. And little did I know, this year would also bring experiences of the heart — my first true encounter with love — which would test me in ways even harder than any exam.

The first term of Secondary Five was a true test of both my discipline and ambition. After entering the new class with a heart full of hope and confidence, I was determined not to repeat the mistakes of the past. From the very first day, I set a clear goal: to study seriously, participate actively in class, and make this term one of remarkable achievement.

Every morning, I woke early, long before the first bell rang. I would review the previous day's lessons, organize my notes, and mentally prepare for the challenges of the day. The classrooms were alive with the energy of eager minds, but unlike some students who were easily distracted by gossip or jokes, I focused on listening intently to every word the teachers said. I began to notice something important — the small efforts made consistently had a greater impact than occasional bursts of study. It was no longer enough to cram for exams; understanding and steady preparation were the keys to success.

As the weeks passed, my efforts began to bear fruit. Tests and quizzes came frequently, and with each one, I grew more confident. I passed all the exams with good marks, solidifying my belief that hard work truly brings results. But success in academics was not my only focus. Secondary Five presented new opportunities

beyond the classroom, and I was eager to explore them.

One of the most exciting moments of the term came when I decided to join the Media Club of our school. The club was known for its creativity, energy, and influence in the school community. It was here that I discovered a new passion — journalism. Being able to write articles, conduct interviews, and report on school events awakened in me a sense of responsibility and pride.

Soon, I was entrusted with the role of school journalist, a position that filled me with immense honor. Standing in front of the entire school, addressing both students and leaders, I felt a thrill unlike anything I had experienced before. It was a mixture of pride, responsibility, and excitement. Through this role, I learned not only how to communicate effectively but also how to listen, observe, and convey the truth accurately. Every event I reported on, every announcement I delivered, sharpened my confidence and strengthened my character.

While my academic life and involvement in the Media Club kept me busy, I also observed the behavior and attitudes of my classmates. I noticed that some students spent their time idly, gossiping or engaging in meaningless conflicts. It reminded me of a truth I had once heard but now experienced deeply: “If you walk with poor-minded people, you become poor-minded; if you walk with intelligent people, you become intelligent.”

I began to choose my friends carefully. I spent more time with students who were motivated, disciplined, and focused on their goals. Discussions with them were productive and inspiring. We shared ideas, studied together, and encouraged each other to excel. On the other hand, I kept my distance from those whose only focus seemed to be wasting time or creating unnecessary drama. The difference in mindset became obvious — those around me influenced my thinking, my motivation, and even the quality of my work.

As the term progressed, I developed a routine that balanced academics, extracurricular activities, and personal growth. I dedicated specific hours to studying, others to Media Club projects, and some time to reflect on my goals and experiences. I learned that success was not just about intelligence but also about planning, discipline, and choosing the right environment.

By the end of the first term, all my hard work and focus had paid off. My grades were the best in my class, and I had grown not only academically but also

personally. I was no longer just a student who studied to pass exams — I was someone who embraced challenges, sought knowledge, and understood the value of associating with the right people. The respect I had earned from teachers, school leaders, and classmates filled me with a sense of achievement and motivation to continue on this path.

The first term of Secondary Five became a turning point in my life. I realized that education was not merely about memorizing lessons but about developing a mindset for excellence. I learned that your environment shapes your thoughts and actions, that leadership comes from both courage and responsibility, and that true success is built on consistent effort and intelligent choices.

By the time the first term ended, I felt a deep sense of satisfaction. I had not only achieved academically but had also grown emotionally and socially. The lessons I learned — about hard work, the influence of company, and the importance of seizing opportunities — were as valuable as any exam score. I knew that if I continued on this path, the rest of Secondary Five could be even more rewarding, filled with growth, challenges, and new experiences that would shape my life forever.

The second term of Secondary Five began with a sense of renewal. Having finished the first term with excellent results and pride in my achievements, I was determined to continue on the same path. I had discovered a rhythm that worked for me — balancing academics, school responsibilities, and personal growth — and I entered the term with confidence and focus.

From the first day, I applied the same dedication I had shown in the first term. Every lesson became an opportunity to learn something new. I would revise early in the morning, ask questions in class, and discuss complex topics with my classmates. But beyond academics, the second term brought back memories that had lingered in my heart for years — memories of a girl I had admired back in Primary Six.

She was beautiful, graceful, and intelligent, capturing the attention of everyone around her. Even though I had tried to express my feelings, she had ignored my love at the time. That memory stayed with me for years, shaping my understanding of emotions and patience. Now, as I reflected on it during quiet moments of study, I realized that love, like life, often demands respect, restraint, and understanding. It

was a lesson in humility, in waiting, and in focusing on growth even when the heart yearns for something it cannot yet have.

Despite the memories, I did not allow them to distract me. I studied with the same consistency as before, passing all the tests and exams of the second term with confidence. My teachers continued to notice my diligence, often praising my curiosity and participation. I began to admire them even more, not only for their knowledge but also for the courage and dedication they brought to teaching. They inspired me to strive harder, showing me that learning was not just about passing exams but about embracing knowledge with passion and responsibility.

By the time the third term began, I had fully embraced the responsibilities of being both a student and a member of the Media Club. I studied well, collaborated with my classmates, and continued to participate actively in school events. The third term tested my endurance, but I had learned the value of persistence. I observed that not all classmates shared the same motivation, yet I did my best to cooperate and support them in studying for exams, even when they were reluctant. That effort not only strengthened my friendships but also taught me that leadership and influence often come from guidance, patience, and encouragement.

In Secondary Five, our class was small, consisting of only nineteen students — fourteen girls and five boys. Despite the small number, our bond grew strong. Among the boys, I admired the courage, determination, and unique habits of Free Boy, Nisasani, Lion, and Christian.

Free Boy loved music, and his dream was to become a music producer. Whenever there was no teacher in class, he would make beats using the desk as a drum, and the rest of us would join in to sing along. His creativity and passion for music inspired me and reminded me that pursuing your dreams is as important as studying.

Lion was incredibly courageous, always joking and making everyone laugh. His dream was to become a journalist, and his energy and humor made every day brighter. He could turn a boring moment into something memorable with just a glance or a joke I do miss his jokes..

Nisasani was the funniest of the four, fearless, and stubborn. You could not make him understand something if he didn’t want to. He refused even what the teachers said sometimes, and he feared nobody. His confidence and rebellious spirit

reminded me that individuality and courage have value when balanced with discipline.

Christian was quiet, thoughtful, and always respectful. He loved to pray and had a gentle heart, and he also liked girls even though he knew to manage it.. His calm nature and sincerity made him dependable and trustworthy.

I liked all of these boys because of their habits and their aims. Each of them was different, yet together we formed a team that balanced creativity, humor, courage, and calm determination. We became inseparable, sharing notes, discussing difficult topics, and motivating one another. Those friendships became a source of strength, proving that surrounding yourself with focused and determined people accelerates personal growth.

Throughout the year, I became increasingly recognized in the school, not only for my academic performance but also for my role in the Media Club. Speaking in front of students, reporting events, and writing articles gave me a reputation of responsibility and creativity. It was a reminder that school life is not only about books but also about seizing opportunities, taking on responsibilities, and learning how to communicate and lead.

The second and third terms were more than just exams and classes. They were a time of reflection, personal growth, and life lessons. I learned that hard work and consistency always bear fruit, that the company you keep influences your growth, and that admiring and learning from courageous teachers enhances your understanding of life itself. I also realized that respecting and cooperating with classmates, even those less willing to study, is an essential part of maturity. Leadership and influence are not just about authority; they are about encouragement, patience, and empathy.

When the school year ended, the results revealed that only seventeen students were to move on to Secondary Six — twelve girls and all five boys. The reduction in numbers reflected both the rigor of the year and the consequences of choices made. Some students had failed to meet the standards; others had not focused as they should. Once again, I realized that life rewards diligence and punishes carelessness. Success is never guaranteed, but effort, discipline, and the courage to pursue excellence always increase the chances of achievement.

Looking back on my journey through Secondary Five, I understood that the year was not merely about academics. It was about personal development, about understanding the value of environment and companionship, and about embracing opportunities with courage and responsibility. I learned that admiration for teachers, collaboration with classmates, and involvement in school activities like the Media Club all contribute to growth. I also understood that love, patience, and emotional control are as important as knowledge and skills.

The year of Secondary Five prepared me fully for Secondary Six, the final year before the national exams. I felt ready not only academically but also mentally, emotionally, and socially. With seventeen students moving on, I knew that we were a team forged through shared challenges, cooperation, and mutual encouragement. And as I looked forward to Secondary Six, I promised myself that I would face it with the same courage, diligence, and responsibility that had guided me through the years.

The lessons of Secondary Five remain with me:

Consistent effort brings success.

The company you keep influences your growth.

Respect and learn from those who teach you.

Cooperate and uplift others, even if they are reluctant.

Seize opportunities beyond academics to grow in leadership and confidence.

Love, patience, and restraint are as important as intellect.

These were not just lessons for me, but lessons I wished every student and young child could embrace — that life rewards discipline, courage, and wisdom, and that the choices we make today shape the people we become tomorrow.

The first days of Secondary Six began with a determination I had never felt before. This was my last year of high school, the year that would test all the effort,

discipline, and knowledge I had built over the past five years. I stepped into my classroom with a mixture of courage, hope, and excitement. My mind was focused, my heart set on achieving the best results possible in the upcoming national exams.

Every morning, I woke up early, reviewing lessons I had studied in Secondary Five. I organized my notes meticulously, prepared for each subject, and set small daily goals to ensure that no topic would remain unclear. I reminded myself that diligence and consistency were the only ways to succeed. Unlike previous years, I no longer feared failure; instead, I approached the year with a strong belief in my abilities. The courage to study became my shield against distractions, laziness, and peer pressure.

For the first few weeks, my routine remained strict. I attended classes attentively, participated in discussions, and helped my classmates whenever they needed support. Free Boy, Nisasani, Lion, and Christian continued to motivate me. Free Boy's creativity, Lion's courage, Nisasani's humor, and Christian's calmness made studying enjoyable and strengthened our friendship. I felt prepared to face any challenge, academically and personally.

Then, one day, something unexpected happened. It was lunchtime, a moment when students usually hurried to the canteen or talked with friends. I had my mind partially on food, but something caught my eye — a girl walking past my classroom. She moved with a graceful presence that made it impossible to look away. Her steps were confident, her hair shining under the sunlight streaming through the windows, and her smile held a charm I had never seen before. She seemed to illuminate the corridor with a quiet, effortless elegance.

Curiosity immediately overcame my focus on lunch. I turned to Nisasani and asked, "Hey, do you know who she is?"

Nisasani grinned and replied, "Oh, that's Denyse. She's one of the new students who came this year to start Secondary Four. She's in the languages class, I think."

Hearing this filled me with excitement. Languages class meant she was intelligent and likely hardworking — qualities I admired as much as beauty itself. In that moment, lunch became insignificant; I no longer thought about the meal in front of me. My attention was completely drawn to Denyse, to the way she carried herself, to the charm in her expressions.

I felt a sudden pull, an irresistible desire to meet her, to know her, and perhaps to simply witness her presence more closely. Without hesitation, I decided to go down to her classroom, which was below mine. As I walked, my mind raced with thoughts about her — her beauty, her smile, the way her eyes seemed to reflect both intelligence and kindness. I noticed her long hair flowing gracefully, her posture confident but natural, and the gentle way she interacted with other students in passing. Every small movement seemed deliberate yet effortless, leaving an impression I could not ignore.

By the time I reached the corridor outside her classroom, a strange mix of excitement and fear washed over me. My heart beat faster than usual. I had never felt such a combination of admiration and nervousness. There was something in her presence that demanded both attention and respect. Denyse was not only beautiful in the way anyone could notice at first glance — she had a certain elegance, a natural charm that radiated intelligence and grace. Her eyes were bright and expressive, conveying curiosity and warmth at the same time. Her smile was subtle yet powerful, capable of making anyone around her feel captivated.

Standing outside her classroom, I realized I was a little hesitant. I had never approached a girl with such intensity before, and yet something inside me encouraged me to try. The fear I felt was not just of rejection; it was also the unfamiliarity of experiencing these emotions for the first time. But the courage I had built throughout my years of study pushed me forward. I reminded myself that life rewards those who dare to take steps toward what they desire, whether in academics or personal matters.

As I lingered there, observing her from just outside the door, I felt a strange mix of admiration, respect, and curiosity. Denyse seemed almost ethereal — her beauty was both delicate and striking, a combination that made her unforgettable. Her presence sparked in me a new awareness: the first stirrings of love, gentle yet undeniable, had begun. At the same time, I promised myself that this new feeling would not distract me from my studies. Secondary Six was a year of challenges, responsibilities, and dreams, and I was determined to balance heart and mind.

The sight of Denyse left a mark on me, a memory I knew would linger for the entire year. Even as I walked back to my classroom, I could not stop thinking about her. Every detail of her presence — the way she smiled, the confident way she walked, the calm assurance in her expression — played repeatedly in my mind. In that moment, I understood something profound: first love is a quiet awakening, a mixture of admiration, curiosity, and respect that gradually grows into deeper

emotions.

That day marked the beginning of a journey — my final year in high school, my preparation for the national exams, and the delicate, exciting experience of first love. Denyse's beauty and presence had captured my attention, but my courage, discipline, and focus would determine how I balanced these new emotions with the responsibilities that lay ahead. And though fear lingered in my heart, it was accompanied by a sense of anticipation — a knowing that this year would be unforgettable, both academically and personally.

The next day, I decided that I had to go and speak to her. My heart was racing, and a mixture of fear and excitement filled me. It was my first time feeling this way about a girl, and the emotions were overwhelming. As lunchtime approached, I walked toward her classroom, trying to calm myself.

Peeking through the window, I saw her sitting on the last desk, quietly writing in her notebook. The sunlight fell gently on her hair, giving her an almost glowing presence. She seemed focused, unaware of the world outside her desk.

Taking a deep breath, I entered the classroom. Almost instantly, I noticed that all eyes turned toward me. Her classmates knew me; my reputation in the school preceded me. I smiled, greeting a few students politely, and made my way toward her desk.

"Hi," I said softly, trying to sound confident despite my pounding heart.

Denyse looked up from her notebook, her expression calm yet serious. "Hi," she replied in a soft, melodic voice.

I cleared my throat. "Uh… my name is Saint. What's yours?"

She smiled faintly, the corners of her lips curling just enough to make her look approachable yet composed. "I'm Denyse," she answered.

I nodded and hesitated for a moment before speaking again. "I… I'm from Secondary Six, languages combination. I've liked languages for as long as I can remember." I hesitated for a fraction of a second, realizing I had just lied, but I

quickly smiled, hoping to seem confident.

Denyse's eyes twinkled slightly, as if she had noticed my nervousness. "Languages, huh? That's interesting," she said softly, returning to her notebook briefly.

"I… I saw you yesterday passing around my class," I continued, trying to sound casual. "And… I wanted to talk to you. You were… um, very… noticeable." My voice faltered slightly, and I immediately felt embarrassed. She looked at me but did not laugh or frown; she just tilted her head and gave a faint, acknowledging smile.

"You really came all the way here to talk to me?" she asked, curiosity evident in her tone.

"Yes," I said quickly. "I… I thought maybe we could be friends?" I added, carefully choosing my words. I knew better than to confess love at the first meeting — it might seem foolish or pushy.

Denyse studied me for a moment, her serious eyes scanning my face as if evaluating my sincerity. Then she nodded. "Okay… we can be friends."

Relief washed over me. I sat down beside her, keeping my posture respectful yet approachable. As I looked at her, I noticed the careful way she held her pen, the delicate movements of her fingers, and the soft tone of her voice as she spoke. She was serious and focused, yet I sensed warmth behind her composed exterior.

"So… where have you been? I heard you were sick for almost a week," I asked, trying to make conversation while stealing glances at her lips as she spoke. Every word she said was soft, measured, and slightly slow — each movement of her mouth seemed deliberate, almost hypnotic.

"Yeah… I wasn't feeling well. Doctors said it was just a cold, but it took some time to recover," she said quietly.

"I'm glad you're back," I said sincerely. "It's… nice to see you in school."

She nodded, giving me a faint smile. "Thank you."

There was a pause, and I took a breath. I wanted to make her laugh or at least feel comfortable. "You know… I can tell you're serious. Talking to you… it feels like I have to pay attention to every word." I grinned slightly, hoping to add a touch of humor.

Denyse's eyes flickered with amusement, though she remained composed. "And you?" she asked, raising an eyebrow slightly.

"I… I like to joke sometimes," I admitted, smiling. "I hope that's okay with you."

She nodded once, slowly. "It's fine."

We talked for several minutes — small talk at first, about school, our subjects, teachers, and classmates. I noticed how attentive she was, listening carefully, giving thoughtful replies, and maintaining eye contact. At the same time, I was conscious of my own gestures, trying to appear natural despite my nervousness.

"Do you like your class?" I asked, trying to keep the conversation flowing.

"It's okay," she said softly. "I like languages, but… it's a lot of work."

"Yeah," I said, smiling. "I like languages too. Maybe we can help each other study sometime."

She tilted her head, considering this. "Sure," she said finally. "We can."

At that moment, I felt a small victory. Our first meeting had ended with a promise of friendship, and that was enough for now. I had observed her seriousness, her intelligence, and the quiet charm that made her so captivating. I understood that first impressions were delicate, and that mutual respect and careful words mattered more than bold confessions.

Before leaving, I added a small joke about lunch: "By the way… did you eat today? Or are you still writing notes?"

Denyse allowed herself a faint laugh — the first I had heard from her — and it was soft but genuine. "I ate already," she replied. "Now back to notes."

As I left her classroom, my heart felt lighter. I had made my first friend in Secondary Six, someone who had already captured my attention and admiration. That day marked the beginning of a journey — friendship first, love perhaps later, but always respect and understanding at the center.

Meeting someone for the first time is always a mix of fear, curiosity, and excitement. You notice every detail — the way they move, how they speak, the expressions that cross their face, even the way they handle everyday tasks. I realized that first encounters are small windows into a person's world, offering hints about personality, character, and potential connections.

From that lunchtime onward, my relationship with Denyse began. It was careful, respectful, and full of curiosity, and it set the foundation for what would become my first love — a love that grew alongside my final year of high school, balancing emotions with the responsibility of preparing for the national exams.

The bell had just rung for lunch, and as I walked to Denyse's class, my heart was racing faster than I had ever felt before. I had carried this secret in my chest for too long, and I knew if I delayed, another boy might steal her away.

When I entered her classroom, I tried to pretend I was calm. Some of her classmates noticed my presence. A few whispered, others smiled knowingly. I greeted them politely.

"Good afternoon, friends," I said softly.

They responded in unison, "Good afternoon."

But I could see from the corner of my eye that some of them were exchanging looks, as if they already guessed why I had come.

I walked toward her desk. Denyse was busy writing her notes, her pen moving gracefully across the page. She looked up, her bright eyes meeting mine, and smiled.

“Hello,” she said gently.

“Hello, Denyse,” I replied, trying to keep my voice steady. “May I sit here for a while?”

She nodded, pushing her books slightly to the side. “Of course, sit.”

For a few seconds, I was silent, watching her arrange her pen, her handwriting neat and beautiful. Then I asked, “How have you been feeling about our friendship? I mean… the time we have been spending together?”

She paused, placing her pen down. “Our friendship?” she repeated, raising her eyebrows as if to weigh the question. “It has been good, Saint. You are different from other boys. You are respectful. I feel safe with you.”

Her words gave me courage. My chest tightened, and I decided that the moment had come.

I took a deep breath. “Denyse, I want to tell you something. After spending many days being friends with you, I’ve realized something. I… I have found myself loving you. I don’t know how it happened, but my heart chose you. Denyse, would you accept for us to become more than friends?”

The classroom suddenly felt silent. Even though no one else was listening directly, my heart pounded so hard that I thought everyone could hear it.

Denyse looked at me for a long time, her eyes searching mine. She didn’t speak immediately. She placed her chin on her palm and seemed to sink deep into thought. Those minutes felt like hours.

Finally, she spoke slowly, her voice calm but serious. “Saint, I… I need some time to think about this. You are my friend, and I don’t want to make a decision in a hurry.”

Her answer didn’t shock me. I had expected it. No girl, especially one like Denyse, would respond to such a question immediately.

I forced a small smile. “I understand. Take your time, Denyse. I’ll be waiting for your answer.”

The bell rang, calling us back to class. I stood, pushed my chair back, and whispered, “Goodbye for now.”

“Goodbye,” she said, looking at me with eyes that seemed warmer than before.

When I walked back into my own class, I found my classmates laughing and playing since the teacher hadn’t yet arrived. Some of them looked at me curiously.

One of them shouted across the room:
“Eh Saint, where have you been? Don’t tell us you went to see your girlfriend!”

The whole class burst into laughter.

I tried to smile, pretending not to take it seriously. “No, no… I just went to say hello to a friend.”

But they didn’t stop teasing me.
“Friend? Hah! We know your secrets!” another classmate said, winking. “We saw the way you were walking confidently to Denyse’s class.”

I laughed softly but inside, my heart was still racing from what I had just done. I didn’t confirm their suspicions, but I knew the jokes would continue.

As the teacher entered, everyone quickly returned to their seats. The lesson went on, but I could hardly focus. All I could think about was Denyse’s words: “I need some time to think about this.”

Later that evening, as we walked home, my close friends — the four boys who always knew me well — started questioning me.

Free Boy: “So, Saint, it’s true? You finally confessed to Denyse?”

Me: (smiling nervously) “Yes… I told her.”

Nisasani: “And what did she say? Did she accept you?”

Me: “She didn’t give me an answer yet. She said she needs time.”

The boys looked at one another and laughed.

Lion: “That’s normal. No girl gives an answer immediately. Just be patient.”

Free Boy: “But Saint, you must be careful. Other boys are also interested in her. If you sleep on the job, she might slip away.”

Christian: “Yes, but I believe Denyse has already seen Saint’s seriousness. That will count for something.”

I listened quietly, grateful for their encouragement but still worried inside. I knew I had to wait — and waiting was the hardest part.

Two days passed, and every hour of those days seemed heavier than the last. I had told myself over and over again that when I finally went back to Denyse, she would give me her answer. My heart carried hope like a lamp burning in the darkness.

That afternoon, during free time, I decided it was the right moment. I walked with confidence towards her class, repeating silently: “Today she will tell me something. Today she will end my waiting.”

When I reached the corridor, I noticed something strange. The classroom doors were wide open, and laughter floated from outside. Almost all the students were scattered across the compound, playing or chatting. I peered inside her classroom expecting to find her bent over her books as usual.

But the desk was empty.

I blinked and stepped inside. Could it be possible? Denyse was a girl different from all the others. She never wasted time outside gossiping or playing. She always stayed in class, quietly writing notes, reading, or preparing herself. That's why she stood out. But this time, her chair was vacant, her books missing.

I turned to a group of girls standing near the door. Among them, I recognized Lena — Denyse's best friend. I approached her with a smile, even though my stomach had already begun to twist in anxiety.

"Hello, Lena," I greeted politely.

"Hello, Saint," she answered, smiling warmly. "You are looking for Denyse, right?"

"Yes," I admitted. "I expected to find her here. She is always in class at this hour. Where is she?"

Lena hesitated a little, then leaned closer to me, lowering her voice. "She isn't around today. She left earlier."

Her words struck me like a slap. I stared at her, unable to believe it. "She… she left?"

"Yes," Lena confirmed softly. "She didn't tell me where she was going, only that she had something to handle."

For a moment, the hope I had carried with me collapsed inside. I had been so sure that this would be the day Denyse gave me her response. The courage I had built up, the expectation that I would finally know where I stood — all of it seemed wasted.

But as a boy, I forced myself not to show the storm inside me. I curved my lips into a small smile, trying to look strong.

"Alright," I said calmly. "Thank you, Lena. I appreciate it."

She looked at me with kindness, perhaps understanding what I was going through. "Don't worry, Saint. Maybe she will talk to you soon."

I nodded, though in my heart I knew those words did not heal the wound. I turned and left the classroom slowly, each step heavy with disappointment.

When I reached my own class, a few of my classmates looked up at me curiously. Some of them had begun to notice my frequent visits to Denyse's classroom. Their eyes followed me as if they already guessed what had happened.

One boy leaned across the desk and whispered, "Saint, where's your friend today? Didn't you find her?"

I tried to laugh, though my voice cracked slightly. "Not today. She wasn't around."

Another classmate added with a smirk, "Ahh… that means no answer yet, eh?"

I didn't respond, only smiled faintly and dropped into my seat. Inside, my thoughts were roaring. I picked up a book from my desk, but the words on the page blurred. I turned the pages without even noticing what I was reading.

The bell rang for lunch, and most of the students rushed out excitedly. Normally, I would have joined them, since I always believed a strong mind needed a healthy body. But that day, food seemed tasteless in my imagination.

Free Boy, noticing me still seated, called from the doorway:

Free Boy: "Saint, aren't you coming to lunch?"

Me: (shaking my head) "No, not today. I don't feel hungry."

Nisasani: (walking back into class) "Eh, that's strange. You, Saint, refusing food? What's wrong? Did Denyse refuse you?"

Me: (forcing a laugh) “No, no… nothing like that. I’m just not in the mood to eat.”

Lion: (teasing) “Aha! I know what’s happening. It’s love. Love is eating our Saint instead of him eating food!”

The boys burst into laughter, but Christian looked at me more seriously.

Christian: “Don’t joke too much, guys. Maybe he just wants some quiet time. Saint, are you okay?”

Me: (nodding) “I’m fine. Don’t worry.”

But I wasn’t fine. As they left for lunch, I remained alone in the classroom. My stomach was empty, but it didn’t matter. My mind was full — full of Denyse’s beauty, her gentle voice, the hope of her answer, and the fear that maybe I was losing her.

I leaned my head against the desk and whispered to myself, “Why didn’t I find her today? Why now, when I was so ready?”

The rest of the afternoon dragged slowly. Each tick of the clock reminded me of my disappointment. That day, I realized how deeply my feelings for Denyse had grown, stronger than my appetite, stronger even than my usual passion for books.

It had been a week since I last went to look for Denyse and found her desk empty. That week, every moment in class, every free time, I spent thinking about our friendship and wondering when she would finally give me a response. My mind was restless, bouncing between hope and worry.

I was sitting in my classroom, my notebooks open but my mind elsewhere, imagining what it would be like to finally hear her answer, when Lena suddenly appeared at the door.

“Saint,” she called softly, smiling. “Denyse is around, and she wants to see you.”

The moment those words left her mouth, my heart skipped several beats. For a second, my world seemed to stop, and everything else in the classroom faded away. I quickly gathered my notebooks and followed Lena out of the classroom.

When we reached the corridor, Lena stopped. “I’ll wait here. She’s inside,” she said, gesturing to the classroom.

I nodded, swallowing nervously. Only a few students remained in the room, but they hardly mattered now. I stepped inside, greeted them softly, and moved straight toward Denyse’s desk.

When I finally looked at her face, all the worries, all the stress of the past week, seemed to vanish. She smiled at me gently.

“Hello, Saint. Please, have a seat,” she said softly.

I took a seat opposite her, my eyes fixed on her. She took a deep breath and began speaking.

“I’m sorry for all the days I wasn’t around,” she said, her voice slightly trembling. “I was really sick, and that’s why I couldn’t attend class.”

Immediately, I felt a wave of sympathy. “I’m sorry to hear that. I hope you’re feeling better now,” I said.

She nodded and smiled. “I am, thank you. But… I wanted to talk to you about something important.”

My heart skipped again, anticipation and fear mixing in a strange way. “Really? Are you going to tell me something good?” I asked, trying to sound casual but failing miserably.

Denyse laughed softly, a sound that made my chest tighten. “It doesn’t matter here. Let’s go to the school library. It’s quiet there, and we can talk properly.”

I nodded immediately, feeling a rush of excitement. We stood up, and I noticed my hands were trembling slightly. As we walked to the library, I held my head high, but inside I felt like my heart might explode.

Once inside the library, we picked up a few books—not because we intended to read, but just to have something to do while we talked. I kept sneaking glances at her, marveling at how calm and beautiful she looked in that quiet, sunlit space.

Denyse turned toward me, her eyes serious yet soft. “Saint… even though I didn’t tell you before, I found myself loving you too,” she confessed, her cheeks slightly pink.

I froze, unsure if I had heard correctly. “You… you love me?” I whispered, my voice trembling.

“Yes,” she said, looking down for a moment, then meeting my gaze again. “It’s not bad to fall in love. But I was worried… you’re preparing for the national exams this year, and love… love can bring stress. I didn’t want to make things difficult for you.”

I smiled softly, reaching out my hand to hers across the books. “Denyse, I think before I do anything. I’ll never let love distract me from my studies. I promise. And… I feel the same way about you.”

Her eyes widened slightly, a smile spreading across her face. “You… you love me?”

“Yes,” I said, a rush of joy surging through me. “I’ve been waiting to hear your answer for so long… I’m glad you feel the same.”

Her smile grew, and I could feel the tension in my chest melt away. In a moment of overwhelming happiness, I found myself leaning toward her, hugging her tightly, and planting a gentle kiss on her lips. It was my first kiss, and I felt a warmth I had never known before. At that moment, I realized that my romantic period had officially begin.

We left the library, hand in hand, walking around the school grounds. As we passed by other students, I noticed some of them staring, and a few girls from my class, drinking water outside, giggled quietly. But none of that mattered. I felt confident and proud to be walking with Denyse. That day would forever remain unforgettable in my life—the day I fell in love.

When Denyse left, I walked back to my classroom, still smiling for no reason. My joy was uncontainable. My classmates, seeing my strange grin, whispered among themselves, curious about what had happened.

One of my best friends, Retifa, noticed my expression and smiled knowingly. She had always been the one to teach me how to talk to girls and never give up when I loved someone. I ran to her and hugged her tightly, silently thanking her for all her guidance.

Later, when my four friends—Free Boy, Nisasani, Lion, and Christian—heard the news, their excitement was palpable. They cheered and teased me, but I didn't mind. That day, I was on top of the world, experiencing a joy so pure that nothing could touch it.

For the first time, I understood what it felt like to love and be loved. And in that moment, everything seemed perfect—my life, my studies, my heart, and my future with Denyse.

After that unforgettable day in the library, my relationship with Denyse began to change. I no longer visited her class simply as a friend; I went there as her boyfriend, and it felt like a completely new world. My first time falling in love was filled with joy, nervousness, and excitement, and it was the same for Denyse.

Every morning, I would enter my classroom, but my eyes always glanced toward hers. Sometimes she would smile shyly, sometimes she would pretend not to notice me, but I could feel her heart was racing, just as mine was.

During break times, I would walk to her class, greet her with a gentle smile, and sometimes we would spend a few minutes just talking about schoolwork, dreams, or simple things like the weather. Our hands would brush, and a small warmth would spread across me each time.

One day, as we were leaving school together, she looked at me seriously.

Denyse: "Saint, do you know something? I've never felt this way before. You are my first love."

Me: (heart racing) “Me too, Denyse. I feel the same.”

From that day onward, our relationship deepened. I learned so much from her: how serious she was about decisions, how firm she could be when she set her mind to something. I realized that even as her boyfriend, I couldn’t go into her class without her permission. She had boundaries, and I respected them. It made me admire her even more.

Sometimes, I would escort her on her way home, walking together under the sun, talking about life, school, and our dreams. Those moments were precious. Other times, I would return home first, thinking about her smile and how she made everything seem brighter.

Everything seemed perfect until one day, toward the end of the term, Denyse came into my class during a free period. She looked worried, and the moment I saw her, I sensed something serious was coming.

Me: “Denyse, what’s wrong? You look troubled.”

Denyse: (sighing) “Saint… I need to tell you something. It’s about my home and school.”

Me: (nervously) “What happened? Tell me.”

She lowered her voice and told me a story that shocked me.

Denyse: “My parents… they have decided to move me to the nearest school to home. If everything goes as they planned, I might have to go to a boarding school. I don’t know when it will happen exactly, but I wanted you to know first.”

I felt my chest tighten. My mind spun, imagining the distance, the missed moments, and the fear of losing her.

Me: “Denyse… I… I don’t know what to say. This is… difficult.”

Denyse: (smiling faintly) “Don’t worry, Saint. I really love you, and nothing will change that. Even if I go to another school, I want us to remain together.”

Her words calmed me slightly, but a small part of me still feared the unknown.

During the exam period, some of my classmates noticed Denyse's frequent visits to my desk and started teasing me.

Free Boy: "Saint, eh! You're lucky. Your girlfriend is coming to see you in class? Hah, enjoy it while you can!"

Nisasani: "Careful, Saint. Don't get distracted by love now. Exams are near, and you must focus!"

Lion: (teasing) "Hmm… that's dangerous. Love and exams together? I wouldn't risk it."

Christian: "Yeah, but Saint, she seems serious about you. Just don't let it ruin your studies."

Me: (laughing) "Don't worry. I can handle both."

I smiled confidently. Deep down, I knew I had to balance both. Denyse was understanding and supportive, and that made everything easier.

The exam days came, and Denyse never failed to visit me during breaks. We would sit quietly together, exchanging encouraging words. One afternoon, while I was revising my notes, she whispered:

Denyse: "Saint, no matter what happens in the exams, I'm proud of you. You're doing so well, and I know you can succeed."

Me: "Thank you, Denyse. Your support means everything to me."

Finally, the day of the report arrived. I had performed well, becoming the second in my class. That day, Denyse came to my desk with a smile brighter than ever.

Denyse: “Saint, my parents haven’t told me about my new school yet. But I wanted you to have my number. You can call me during the vacation.”

I took the piece of paper with her phone number, my hands trembling. My heart swelled with happiness.

Me: “Thank you, Denyse. I promise I’ll stay in touch, and we’ll see each other soon.”

Walking out of class that day, I felt proud, confident, and full of joy. The first term had ended, but the memories of those moments with Denyse—the laughter, the love, the small gestures—would remain with me forever.

Looking back, that term taught me a lot. I had discovered love for the first time, and it was mutual. I had learned to balance school and romance, to respect boundaries, and to cherish every moment with someone special. Denyse had shown me patience, seriousness, and genuine care, and I realized that this was the beginning of something beautiful—a relationship built on trust, respect, and love.

Even though uncertainty about the future loomed, the connection we shared was strong. Every time I thought about her, a smile would appear on my face, and I felt grateful for having experienced my first love with someone as wonderful as Denyse.

If Denyse wasn’t a good girl, I could have found myself regretting everything. I realized that the true value of a person is not just in beauty or charm, but in character, in the way she treats you and supports you through life.

Many girls at school seemed interested only in material things—who had the newest phone, the most stylish shoes, or the richest family. But Denyse was different. From the very beginning, she showed me that what mattered most was heart, honesty, and respect. She never demanded gifts, never pressured me to spend money, and never judged me for what I had or didn’t have.

One afternoon, while I was struggling with a difficult math problem, Denyse came over to my desk.

Denyse: “Saint, don’t worry too much. You’ll understand it if you take it step by step. Let me explain it to you.”

She didn’t just offer a quick answer—she guided me patiently, explaining every detail until I understood. That moment made me realize she wasn’t just my girlfriend; she was my supporter. She wanted me to succeed, not just in love, but in life.

In everyday life, Denyse’s qualities stood out. She was independent and serious about her decisions. If she said she would do something, nothing could make her change her mind. Even as her boyfriend, I couldn’t force her to do anything she didn’t want. That respect for herself and others was rare and admirable.

During school breaks, while many girls rushed to gossip or shop for small pleasures, Denyse preferred to spend her time reading, learning, or quietly observing. One day, while we were sitting under a tree in the school yard, she looked at me and said:

Denyse: “Saint, the world is full of distractions. If we don’t control our time and energy, we waste our potential. Love is important, but so is growth.”

Her words struck me deeply. Here was a girl who could talk about love without losing sight of her goals—and she reminded me to do the same. She was not only my girlfriend but also my advisor, constantly encouraging me to work hard and make the best decisions.

Even in difficult times, Denyse stood by me. During exam periods, when I felt stressed or overwhelmed, she would sit beside me quietly, holding my hand or whispering encouragement.

Denyse: “Saint, you’ve worked so hard. Don’t let fear control you. You are capable of great things.”

Those simple words gave me courage. Many girls might have criticized me for stressing too much or for not achieving perfection immediately, but Denyse lifted me instead of bringing me down. She celebrated my small victories and comforted me in my failures.

Through our relationship in high school I learned that falling in love is not only about happiness and excitement. It’s about trust, respect, and support. Denyse taught me that love should be a partnership. You grow together, encourage each other, and challenge each other to be better.

She never demanded attention or material gifts. She never tried to control me. Instead, she guided me with wisdom, patience, and care. She wasn’t just a girlfriend; she was a mentor, a friend, and a source of strength.

I often compared her to other girls at school and realized how fortunate I was. If she had been like many others—materialistic, careless, or shallow—I might have fallen into regret, losing precious time and energy on someone who didn’t truly care for me.

Even small moments highlighted her difference. One day, when I forgot my water bottle, she offered hers without hesitation. Another time, when I was late for class, she stayed with me quietly, making sure I caught up without gossiping or drawing attention.

She celebrated my achievements, whether in class or during extracurricular activities, and she encouraged me to be ambitious without fear of judgment. Her love was not flashy or material; it was consistent, steady, and meaningful.

As I look back now, I realize that the quality of a partner defines the kind of life and relationship you build. Denyse was rare—someone whose love, wisdom, and integrity made every moment unforgettable. And yet… I knew that life is

unpredictable. Even the best people face challenges, and circumstances could change at any moment.

Would I be able to hold on to such a treasure as Denyse? Would life's obstacles test our bond, or would our love grow stronger? Those questions lingered in my mind, leaving me curious, cautious, and deeply aware that I had found someone truly extraordinary.

If Denyse wasn't a good girl, I would have regretted everything—but now, I knew that finding someone like her was not only a blessing but also a responsibility. A responsibility to cherish, respect, and protect the love that had transformed my life forever.

# Chapter five: THE STORM OF EXAMS

The vacation had ended, and I had passed it very well. The break had been a time for rest, reflection, and thinking about everything I had experienced in the first term — especially my relationship with Denyse. Every day, I would call her on the phone, and just hearing her voice made my heart feel lighter. Sometimes, our conversations lasted hours, filled with laughter, teasing, and discussions about schoolwork, friends, and dreams. Other times, she would answer softly, and I would listen to every word, feeling a warmth I had never felt before.

I longed to see her in person, to hold her hand and sit beside her. I would often imagine walking together on the school grounds, sharing notes, or just laughing quietly. But now, with the second term beginning, I knew it wouldn't be that simple. Denyse had been moved to another school, and though it wasn't extremely far, the distance meant that daily visits were impossible.

Me (thinking): It's strange… last term I could see her almost every day. Now, I can only call her. I hope we'll manage. I hope this distance doesn't weaken our bond.

The first days of the term were quiet in comparison to the lively interactions I had enjoyed in the first term. Each morning, I would wake up with the hope that I could speak to her soon. During breaks, I would find a quiet corner and call her. Sometimes she answered immediately; other times, she didn't, and I would wait, heart pounding, until she did.

Me: "Hello, Denyse… it's me."

Denyse: (softly) "Saint! I was hoping you'd call. How was your morning?"

Me: "It's okay, just… school. I miss seeing you."

Denyse: (chuckling) "I miss you too. But don't worry, we'll see each other soon. For now, we have to manage with calls and messages."

We would spend those few minutes sharing stories, laughing, and encouraging each other. I could hear the concern and care in her voice, and it comforted me. Yet, at the same time, the longing made me ache. I wanted to see her, to hold her hand, to feel the warmth of her presence beside me.

Being apart from Denyse tested my patience. I realized that love was not just about being together physically, but also about trust, understanding, and emotional connection. Each day that passed without seeing her became a lesson in restraint and self-control.

I often found myself thinking about small moments from the first term — her smile in the library, the way she encouraged me during exams, the little notes she left for me. Those memories became my comfort, reminding me why she was different from other girls. She wasn't materialistic or careless. She cared for me in ways that no one else did.

Me (thinking): Many girls only care about gifts or attention, but Denyse… she's different. She encourages me, she supports me, and she's always honest. If she wasn't a good girl, I would have regretted everything.

Every evening, I would imagine how it would be if I could meet her after school. I pictured walking together, talking about our classes, sharing jokes, and planning the future. These thoughts made me smile, but also filled me with a longing that sometimes felt unbearable.

Me: "I wish I could see you now, Denyse. Just for a few minutes."

Denyse: (laughing softly) "I wish the same, Saint. But for now, let's focus on our studies. We'll see each other soon, I promise."

Her reassurance gave me hope, yet the suspense remained. I didn't know when the moment would come, and the uncertainty made every day feel like a small test of patience.

Meanwhile, my friends noticed the change in my routine.

Free Boy: “Saint, you seem quiet these days. Where’s your usual energy?”

Me: “It’s… nothing. Just… busy with studies.”

Nisasani: “Come on, we know! You’re missing Denyse, aren’t you?”

Lion: (laughing) “I can tell. You keep staring at your phone like a love-struck fool.”

Christian: “Be careful, Saint. This distance might distract you from exams if you’re not careful.”

I laughed along, but inside, I felt a mixture of longing and determination. Denyse wasn’t just a girl I liked — she was my supporter, my advisor, and my inspiration. Even from afar, her presence encouraged me to work harder and focus more on my goals.

The first weeks of the term passed slowly. Every call, every message, became a lifeline, keeping our love alive despite the distance. Yet, the suspense of not knowing when we would meet again made every day a test. Would the new school make our bond weaker? Would we find ways to see each other soon, or would time and distance create challenges we couldn’t overcome?

I held onto hope. I believed that love was about more than presence; it was about trust, patience, and understanding. Denyse had shown me that she was rare — unlike many girls at school, she wasn’t materialistic or careless. She cared, encouraged, and guided me, even from a distance. I knew that if she wasn’t a good girl, I would have regretted everything.

And so, with each passing day, I waited. I studied hard, I called her every day, and I dreamed of the moment when we would finally meet again, eager to continue the story we had started in the first term. That longing, that hope, and that suspense became the heartbeat of the second term — a time of anticipation, patience, and love tested by distance.

When Denyse's parents decided to transfer her to a new school, I experienced mixed emotions. On one hand, it was a blessing; on the other, it brought challenges I had never faced before. That moment marked the beginning of a period that was both exciting and difficult — a test of my patience, discipline, and determination.

To be honest, Denyse changing schools was good. I realized that this distance made me more responsible and focused. I had to study hard because I could no longer rely on seeing her in person to brighten my day. I had to manage my time carefully, balancing schoolwork, calls, and personal growth. If she weren't around physically, I would have no choice but to dedicate myself fully to my studies.

Me (thinking): Without her nearby, I can't just sit around dreaming. I have to push myself. Exams are coming, and I need to prove that I can succeed even when love is not physically presen.

Even though I missed her, Denyse's absence taught me many lessons.

1. Independence in Studies

During the first days of the second term, I realized that I had to rely more on myself. I couldn't just sit with her in the library for hours, sharing notes and revising together. I had to plan my study schedule, review lessons on my own, and complete assignments without her immediate guidance. This helped me develop self-discipline and time management skills that I had taken for granted before.

2. Appreciation of Her Presence

Every call, every message from Denyse now felt precious. I began to cherish small things, like hearing her voice after a long day or reading her encouraging words. Her absence highlighted how much her presence had meant to me, and it made our bond even stronger emotionally.

Denyse (on a call): "Saint, I know it's hard not seeing me every day. But think of it as a chance to grow. Study hard and focus on your goals. I'll always be here for you, even from afar."

Her words reminded me that love was not just about physical proximity; it was about support, understanding, and encouragement.

Yet, there were undeniable challenges as well.

1. Lack of Immediate Encouragement

In the first term, seeing Denyse every day gave me motivation. When I felt tired or discouraged, she would be there — a smile, a note, or a word of encouragement could lift my spirits instantly. Without her nearby, I had to find ways to motivate myself, and some days were harder than others.

Me (thinking): If she were here, I wouldn't feel this pressure. I could just sit beside her and feel supported. Now, I have to push myself alone.

2. Loneliness and Longing

There were moments when I walked through the school corridors, surrounded by classmates, yet my mind was filled with her absence. I longed to share a laugh, to whisper encouragement, or simply to hold her hand. The physical distance sometimes felt heavy, making me realize how much I relied on her presence emotionally.

3. Fear of Losing Connection

Distance brings uncertainty. Even though I trusted Denyse completely, I sometimes worried about missing opportunities to connect with her. What if she got busy, or I couldn't reach her? These fears were subtle but real.

The impact of her absence was visible in daily life.

During lunch breaks, I used to sit with her in the first term, sharing food and joking about our classes. Now, I ate alone, occasionally checking my phone to see if she had called.

When I felt discouraged during revision, I had no one to sit beside me and whisper, “You can do it, Saint.” I had to find encouragement within myself.

Walking past her old classroom, I remembered our laughter and shared notes. It was bittersweet, realizing she was no longer there, yet feeling grateful for the memories.

Despite these challenges, I learned to adapt and grow. I began writing notes to myself, planning my day carefully, and setting personal goals. I discovered strength in independence — a skill that would help me far beyond school.

Would this distance test our bond too much? Could we maintain the same closeness despite the physical separation?

These thoughts kept me on edge, curious, and determined. I knew that if I handled this time wisely, I would emerge stronger, and our love would grow even deeper. But the uncertainty also created suspense, leaving me—and my audience—wondering how our story would unfold in the coming months.

Even now, I can say with certainty: if Denyse hadn’t been a good girl, supportive, wise, and caring, I would have regretted everything. But because she was, even distance could not weaken our connection.

After Denyse had changed schools, my first days were miserable. I cannot lie about that. I had been used to her voice on the compound, the way she smiled whenever she saw me, and the way she reminded me, without saying much, that life was more than just books. When she left, it felt like my days had lost a certain color. Walking into the classroom, sitting at my desk, or even moving around during break time felt empty. I would sometimes catch myself staring at the gate, thinking maybe I would see her again. Those days, I realized how much we humans get attached to the presence of others without noticing—until they are gone.

But as time went on, something began to change. What first seemed impossible slowly became normal. Life has this strange way of forcing us to adapt. I got used to the silence, I got used to the absence, and in that silence, I started discovering a new part of myself. I began to focus even more on my books. Instead of using energy thinking of Denyse, I turned that same energy into my studies. By the time

the second term began, I was studying harder than ever before.

That second term was very important for us as students. The national exams were no longer a distant thing—they were now approaching quickly. It was as if the entire school was breathing with one heart, beating faster every day as the exams drew near. Our teachers did not want to leave any of us behind. They reminded us every morning in assembly, and even during casual moments, that our future depended on how much effort we put into these few months.

Among all the leaders in the school, the DOS—Director of Studies—stood out the most. This man had a way of entering the classroom that brought silence immediately. Not a silence of fear, but of respect. He was tall, with sharp eyes, but his words were always fatherly. I really liked him, because he seemed to carry all of us in his heart. He would not spend two days without stepping into our class. Sometimes he came just to remind us to push harder, sometimes to check if we were following up with assignments, and sometimes he even shared short stories of students who had succeeded before us.

I remember one particular morning when he entered our class with a serious face. He told us, “My children, the national exams are not just tests written on paper, they are doors. If you pass, many doors will open for you—universities, jobs, opportunities. If you fail, some doors will close. And the bitter truth is that life rarely waits for those who are not prepared.” Those words pierced my heart like arrows. From that day, I doubled my efforts.

Our DOS also loved the languages class. In fact, it was the pride of the entire school. Whenever the name of the languages class was mentioned, teachers smiled with satisfaction. Why? Because students from this class always passed highly in national exams. The discipline, the teamwork, and the spirit of determination made our class a model for the rest. I was proud to be part of it.

But being part of the best class was not just a privilege—it was also a challenge. It meant we had to maintain that reputation. Teachers expected more from us than from other classes. During tests, even a small mistake felt heavier, because we knew the whole school was watching us. Sometimes I felt the pressure was too much, but then again, I remembered the DOS’s words: these exams were doors to my future.

Outside class, I also noticed how this spirit of encouragement is something we meet in daily life. For example, a parent who checks on their children every evening may seem strict, but in truth, they are showing the same love as our DOS. A coach who pushes players to train harder, even when they are tired, is doing the same. A friend who refuses to let you give up is also playing the same role. Encouragement is a language of love that is sometimes hidden behind discipline.

In those months, I started waking up earlier than before. While some of my classmates arrived just before the bell, I often reached school while the compound was still quiet, carrying my books to revise. There was something about those early hours that felt holy. The air was cool, the birds were singing, and the classroom smelled of chalk and fresh air. In those moments, I felt closer to my dreams than ever before.

My teachers noticed the change in me. One day, my English teacher stopped me after class and said, “You have matured. Keep this pace, and you will not regret.” Those simple words filled me with fire. It is true that sometimes, it only takes one sentence from someone we respect to change our entire mood.

But life, as it always does, started to move on. As days passed, I discovered that the human heart is stronger than it seems. The same heart that once thought it could not survive without someone, slowly learns to beat normally again. I began to accept that Denyse was gone, that I could not see her every day. With that acceptance came a new determination: if she was not around, I had to focus fully on myself and my books.

By the second term, I was no longer the boy who sat quietly wishing things were different. I had transformed into someone who studied harder than before. My notebooks were always filled with summaries, my evenings were dedicated to revision, and my weekends were spent catching up on anything I had missed. What seemed like a loss had, in truth, pushed me into a deeper level of seriousness.

The school environment itself also shaped us during this period. It was not only me who felt the pressure—everyone in the school did. The national exams were approaching, and the atmosphere was thick with urgency. Teachers reminded us daily that our future was at stake. At the morning assembly, the headmaster spoke firmly about discipline and hard work. Class teachers doubled their assignments, and discussions became part of our everyday life.

But but again I'll never forget greatest influence came from our DOS, the Director of Studies. I admired this man greatly. He was not the kind of leader who sat in the office waiting for reports. No—he was a leader who walked among us. He entered our class so frequently that we began to expect him every other day. Sometimes he came with a smile, other times with seriousness, but he always left us with something to think about.

One day, he entered our classroom carrying a stack of old exam papers. He told us, “These papers belong to students who came before you. They sat where you sit, they wrote the same exams you are preparing for, and today many of them are in universities, others are working in good jobs, some even helping their families. They succeeded because they respected time. They studied when they needed to study. You too can do the same, but only if you stop wasting your hours.”

His words carried weight. I looked at those papers and imagined the students who had once written on them. I thought about how they too must have faced challenges, distractions, and even doubts—but they overcame. That day I made a promise to myself: I would not let laziness steal my future.

What made our DOS special was that he combined discipline with encouragement. For example, if he found us making noise in class, he would scold us sharply. But before leaving, he would add, “I am strict because I see potential in you. If I did not care, I would let you waste your time. But I want you to succeed.” These words revealed his heart. It reminded me that in life, true leaders are not those who only smile at you; they are those who correct you and guide you, even when you resist.

Our class—the languages class—was the pride of the school. Everyone knew it. The teachers spoke of us with admiration, and the younger students looked up to us. We had built a reputation over the years for producing excellent results, and now it was our turn to carry that torch. This was both an honor and a burden. On one hand, we felt proud that the whole school respected us. On the other hand, we knew that any failure from us would be seen as a great disappointment.

This pressure shaped us. It forced us to work harder than before. While other classes sometimes played football during prep time, we were in classrooms discussing literature, practicing French pronunciation, or revising English essays. Some students even began sleeping less so they could revise late into the night. It

was not always easy, but we supported one another.

I remember one evening when we had a group discussion for French. The teacher had given us a complex passage to translate, and at first, it seemed impossible. But we sat together, helped each other, and by the end of the session, we were all laughing because what had looked so hard had become simple. That night, I realized something: teamwork has power. Alone, we are limited, but together, we can break through walls.

Looking back, I see how those days taught me lessons that apply even outside school. In families, too, teamwork is essential. When siblings work together, burdens become lighter. In friendships, when one encourages the other, the journey becomes easier. Even in workplaces, collaboration produces results that one person alone cannot achieve. The spirit of teamwork that we practiced in the languages class was a seed that I would carry into my whole life.

There were times, of course, when I felt tired. There were evenings when I stared at my books but my eyes felt heavy. There were mornings when waking up early seemed impossible. In those moments, I remembered the DOS's words: "Exams are doors." I told myself that every extra hour of study was a key, every completed exercise was another lock opened. This gave me strength to keep pushing.

Our teachers also played a huge role. Some of them sacrificed their weekends to give us extra lessons. I recall our English teacher once telling us, "I could be with my family right now, but I am here with you because your success is also my success." Those words touched me deeply. It showed me that true teaching is not just about salary; it is about love and sacrifice.

As the exams approached, our lives became even more disciplined. The timetable was tight, and our free time was almost gone. But strangely, I did not feel imprisoned by this routine. Instead, I felt a sense of purpose. Every day mattered. Every lesson mattered. Every word from a teacher mattered. It was as if we were soldiers preparing for a great battle, and each hour of study was sharpening our weapons.

Outside the academic pressure, I also noticed personal growth in myself. I became more responsible, more mature. I no longer wasted hours in unnecessary talks. I no longer allowed small distractions to pull me away. Even at home, my

parents noticed the change. They saw me reading late into the night and waking up early. My father once said, “Son, I see you are preparing well. Keep this up, and you will make us proud.” Those words were fuel to my spirit.

Life during those days was a mixture of struggle and hope. Struggle, because the work was heavy. Hope, because the future was bright if we succeeded. It taught me a valuable lesson: in life, nothing valuable comes without effort. Whether it is education, relationships, or careers, success always demands sacrifice.

It was about two weeks before the second term examinations. The pressure was already high, and all of us were buried deep in our notes, trying to prepare for the tests ahead. That afternoon, our literature teacher entered the class. He was a man who never simply taught books; he taught life. He had a gift for storytelling, and we all knew that whenever he began a story, even the laziest student sat up straight.

He placed his books on the desk, looked at us one by one, and then said in a low but serious voice, “I want to tell you a story. This story is not found in your literature textbook, but it is one that carries a lesson more valuable than many novels you will ever read.”

The classroom became silent. Even the sound of chalk dropping would have been heard. We were eager. He cleared his throat and began.

“There was once a girl,” the teacher said, “who, like many of you, had spent most of her years in school. She was a bright student, always performing well, and her family had high hopes in her. Everyone believed she would be the one to lift her family out of poverty through education.

But then something happened. Among her teachers was a man who did not respect his position. He was supposed to be her guide, but instead, he became her downfall. He lied to her, telling her that he loved her, that he would take care of her, that if she trusted him, her life would be better. At first, she refused. But little by little, he kept convincing her. He would call her after class, ask her to remain behind, and then speak sweet words that poisoned her mind.

The girl eventually gave in. She thought, ‘This is my teacher. If he promises to treat me well, maybe he means it.’ She trusted him. She even visited his house

several times, where he continued to assure her that everything would be alright. But what started as trust soon became betrayal. Within a few months, she discovered she was pregnant."

Our teacher's voice grew heavier. We could all feel the weight of the story pressing into our hearts.

"Her end was really tragic",I thought

The teacher continued:

"The news of her pregnancy came just days before the national exams. Five days, to be exact. Imagine—you have worked for years, studying late into the night, sacrificing your childhood, believing that your future will shine after the exams… and then suddenly you realize it is all about to collapse.

The girl panicked. She thought of her parents, who had invested all their hope in her. She thought of her classmates, who had looked up to her as one of the brightest. She thought of her community, which expected her to succeed. And she imagined the shame that would come if they discovered she was pregnant—pregnant not by a fellow student, but by her teacher, the very man trusted to protect her.

In her pain, she made a terrible decision. Instead of facing the shame, she chose death. Five days before the exams, she took her own life."

The teacher stopped. The silence that followed was unbearable. None of us moved. None of us breathed too loudly. It was as if death itself had entered the classroom.

I looked around and saw my classmates' faces. Some had tears forming in their eyes. Others stared blankly at the floor, unable to imagine such a thing happening. A few shook their heads slowly, whispering words like "That's sad" or "Oh God."

For me, my heart sank. I felt both anger and sorrow. Anger towards that teacher who had betrayed his profession, and sorrow for the girl who had lost her future. I imagined myself in her place—studying all those years, dreaming of success, only to end it all because of one mistake and one cruel man's lies.

Our teacher broke the silence. "My children," he said, "this is not just a story to entertain you. It is a warning. Temptations will always come, even in your final days of preparation. But you must be strong. You must know that one wrong decision can destroy everything you have built. That girl could have been like any of you. She was intelligent, hopeful, determined. But she allowed a voice of deceit to lead her astray."

He walked slowly across the class, his eyes fixed on us. "Students," he continued, "never forget why you are in school. You are here to build a future, not to destroy it. You are here to lift your families, not to shame them. Do not let anyone—be it a teacher, a friend, or anyone else—take away the treasure you have worked for.

Life will present you with distractions. Some will look sweet, some will look harmless. But behind them may lie destruction. That girl made a choice out of fear, and her life ended before it could bloom. You, on the other hand, have a chance to make choices out of wisdom. Choose to protect your future."

By the time he finished, the class was deeply moved. We no longer saw him only as a literature teacher telling stories; we saw him as a father speaking to his children.

That day, we learned that education is not only about passing exams. It is about protecting yourself from the traps that life sets before you. It is about discipline, focus, and self-respect.

Walking home that evening, I kept thinking about the story. I imagined how her parents must have felt when they heard she had died. I imagined her classmates, who were left to sit their exams with heavy hearts. I imagined the shame of that teacher, who not only ruined his own life but also destroyed the life of his student.

The story stayed with me. It became a voice in my head reminding me that every decision I make has consequences. It reminded me that while exams may determine my grades, my choices will determine my life.

And I could see the same feeling in my classmates. For the next few days, there was a new seriousness in the air. Jokes became fewer, discipline became tighter, and focus became sharper. It was as if the spirit of that unfortunate girl had entered our classroom to warn us not to follow her path.

The second term exams finally arrived. By this time, my heart was ready. I had spent weeks revising, sacrificing my sleep, and listening carefully to every word of my teachers. I walked into the examination hall with confidence. As I sat down and looked at the first paper, I felt a calmness in my chest. It was not arrogance, but assurance—the kind of assurance that comes when you know you have prepared.

Day after day, I worked through the exams, giving them my best effort. When the last paper ended, I breathed deeply and whispered a prayer of thanks. I knew I had done my best, and now the rest was in God's hands.

The report day came quickly. Students filled the compound, their faces mixed with fear and hope, waiting to hear their results. When my name was called and I saw my position, my heart leaped: I was the first in my class. From being second in the first term, I had risen to the very top. That moment filled me with joy and renewed determination. It proved to me that hard work truly pays off.

But even in my joy, I remembered that high school life is not just about results. It is a mixture of many things—some sweet, some bitter. In the same class, while I celebrated, another student somewhere sat quietly with tears because their results had fallen. That is the reality of life: one person celebrates, another mourns; one person rises, another stumbles. And in high school especially, you meet all kinds of people—good friends who push you forward, and bad ones who try to pull you down.

Soon after, we closed for the short holiday. The vacation was only two weeks—so brief that it felt like a long weekend. Yet even in that short time, life gave me space to breathe. I rested, helped my parents at home, and, most importantly, stayed in touch with Denyse. Though she had moved schools, she was still in my heart. During that vacation, I called her many times. Our conversations were filled with

jokes and laughter. She had a way of lightening my mood, and I had a way of making her laugh even when she was down. Those calls gave me some of the funniest moments of that holiday. They reminded me that even in the middle of academic struggles, life is sweeter when you share it with someone who cares about you.

The two weeks passed quickly, and before we knew it, the third term was here. This was the most crucial term, the one that led us straight into the national exams. I returned to school with fresh energy, ready to face whatever was ahead.

But on the very first week, I received news that shook my heart. My childhood friend, Charles, came to me with sadness written all over his face. His eyes were red, his voice low. He looked at me and said, “My father has passed away.”

I froze. Charles was in Secondary Three, but he was more than just a schoolmate; he was my brother in all ways except blood. We had grown together, played football in the same dusty fields, and shared dreams of success. Hearing that his father was gone felt like hearing that part of my own family had been taken away.

I felt deep sorrow for him. In moments like that, words are never enough. But I knew my role. I had always been good at turning people’s pain into strength, at changing bad feelings into hope. I sat with him, listened to him pour out his heart, and then I told him, “Brother, I know this hurts. I know it feels like the world has fallen apart. But you are not alone. Your father may be gone, but his dream for you lives on. You must study even harder now, not less. Make him proud in heaven. Make his name live on through your success.”

Charles looked at me, and I saw a small spark return to his eyes. From that day, he often told me how much my words lifted him. He was proud to have me as a friend, and I was proud to stand with him in his pain.

The burial took place, and though it was a sad day, I walked beside him like a brother. Afterward, life in school moved on, as life always does, but something had changed. That experience taught me that high school life is not just about classes, textbooks, and exams. It is also about people, about standing with your friends in their darkest moments.

I remember another time when one of my classmates failed badly in French. He was devastated and talked about giving up completely. I sat next to him during prep time and told him stories of my own struggles with subjects. I reminded him that failing one test does not mean failing life. Slowly, he smiled again, and he even began asking me for help in revision. These small acts of encouragement may seem simple, but they carry great weight.

High school, truly, is a mixture of everything. One day you are at the top of the class, and the next day you are comforting a friend who has lost a parent. One day you are laughing on the phone with someone you love, and the next day you are crying with a classmate in the dormitory. It is a place of learning, but also a place of growing into maturity.

The third term had just begun, and already it had taught me this lesson: books are important, exams are important, but people are more important. You can forget formulas and still survive, but if you forget to be human—to stand with your friends, to encourage the broken, to lift the fallen—then your education has no meaning.

The days moved on quickly, as they always do in high school. One Wednesday, during the last two hours of the day, we finally had free time. That moment has stayed with me ever since—it was one of those moments I will never forget. I was sitting in my classroom with all my classmates, the room buzzing with energy, laughter, and music.

Free Boy, as everyone called him, was always there to make beats using the desks. He had a special rhythm in his hands; the way he tapped the table, it was almost like a drum set. Merci was never far behind—she could come up with the best songs, often improvising lyrics about our lives, school, and funny incidents that happened to us. And the girls! Retifa who was a really funny girl,Stella, Central Cee, and others sang with voices so clear and melodious that sometimes it felt like the classroom had turned into a concert hall.

I remember looking around and feeling a deep sense of happiness. I really liked my class. It was a mixture of fun and discipline, laughter and focus. In those moments of joy, we were all together, forgetting the stress of exams, sharing jokes, teasing one another, and sometimes even competing for who could make the loudest beats or the best rhymes.

“Free Boy, don’t stop, man! That beat is fire!” Lion shouted, clapping her hands.

“Lion, let me hear your song! Don’t hide it!” Retifa called out.

Stella joined in, “I’ll add my verse—watch me!”

Even I couldn’t help but laugh and join in. We were learning moments as much as we were fun moments—sometimes, our songs included lessons from our studies, like French verbs, English idioms, or general knowledge. Those were moments that made me realize high school is not just about exams—it’s about the people, the memories, and the laughter we share along the way.

Days continued to pass, and soon the reality hit: the national exams were only two weeks away. A mix of excitement and seriousness filled the air. My classmates and I knew that our future would be judged by these exams. We understood the truth: if we worked well, we could have a good future; if not, it could be completely different.

The government had already published the real dates and details of the exams. All students now knew exactly what to expect. Every subject would have multiple-choice questions, and each student would receive a code that they had to use to identify their papers. There was no reason to be afraid—we had all prepared, but the pressure was real.

During breaks, we often discussed our feelings openly. I remember a conversation I had with Charles and Helis one afternoon while walking to the dormitory:

“Are you nervous about Kiswahili?” Charles asked, frowning slightly.

“Not really,” I replied. “We’ve studied everything, right? Just need to stay calm and remember the notes.”

Helis laughed, “I just hope I don’t mix up the tenses! That’s always my problem in exams.”

We all laughed together, but beneath the laughter, there was a shared determination. Each of us knew that these exams were not just papers—they were doors to the future we wanted.

A few days later, we were all given our exam codes. The room buzzed with whispers as we compared numbers. Some of us joked about our codes sounding like secret agent numbers, while others studied them carefully to make sure there were no mistakes.

Finally, the first day of the national exams arrived. It was for Kiswahili and General Studies. Walking into the exam hall, I could feel the anticipation in the air. Every student had their code ready, pens sharpened, and mind focused. Despite the pressure, none of my classmates appeared afraid. There was a sense of quiet confidence.

“Remember,” our invigilator reminded us, “read each question carefully. Take your time. You have prepared for this day.”

And then we began. Page after page, question after question, we worked diligently. Kiswahili was challenging, but the lessons we had learned in class came to mind naturally. General Studies tested our understanding of history, geography, and current events, but again, preparation was key.

After the exams ended, there was a sense of relief. We all walked out quietly.

Even during that first exam day, I noticed small life lessons: some students helped others when they were unsure of instructions, some cheered quietly for friends when the invigilator wasn’t looking, and some learned the importance of patience and focus under pressure. These were not lessons in textbooks—they were lessons in life.

After the day ended, the classroom felt empty but full at the same time. We had done our first step toward the future. Outside, the sun was setting, casting long shadows across the school compound. As I walked back to the dormitory, I looked at my classmates laughing quietly together. Even in such serious times, we found moments of joy, friendship, and hope.

Remember that the national examinations had already started, and I remember walking into the examination hall with a mix of courage and fear. It was the moment we had all been preparing for since the very first day of high school. As I sat in my chair, the question papers were handed out, and I felt a sense of calm take over me. I knew that I had worked hard throughout the years, and I believed in my preparation.

Every subject felt like a test not only of knowledge but also of discipline and focus. Mathematics, which used to frighten many students, came to me as a challenge I was determined to conquer. English, with its endless comprehension passages and essays, became a chance to express my ideas. Science and history reminded me of the countless nights I had spent reviewing, sometimes under dim light, determined to make my parents proud. With each paper I completed, I felt lighter, as though I was leaving behind a chapter of my life.

By the time the final exam ended, I felt a deep sense of relief but also a quiet emptiness. It struck me that this was not just the end of exams; it was the end of my high school journey. The desks where we had once shared laughter and stress, the corridors where friends rushed with books in hand, even the blackboard where teachers wrote lessons—all these things suddenly felt like memories frozen in time.

Now all that was left was to wait. The national board told us the results would be released after two months. Two months may sound short, but for a student waiting to see the results of years of sacrifice, it felt like eternity. Each day that passed was a reminder that my future career—whether I would pursue medicine, engineering, law, or teaching—was tied to those marks.

During this waiting period, I had time to reflect on my journey. I remembered the mornings when I woke up earlier than the sun, carrying my books to revise. I remembered how my teachers had guided me not just academically but also morally, reminding us that knowledge without discipline was incomplete. I remembered my classmates, some of whom had become like siblings to me, as we encouraged each other during difficult moments.

At times, I worried—what if I had made careless mistakes in the exams? What if I had forgotten something simple that would cost me marks? But whenever fear grew, I reminded myself of the effort I had invested. My heart whispered that God rewards those who work hard, and that gave me peace.

High school had shaped me into more than just a student. It had taught me responsibility, endurance, and how to resist the temptations that can easily ruin young people. While some students were caught up in bad habits, I tried to keep my focus on my studies. I wasn't perfect, but I knew I had done my best to keep my eyes on the bigger picture: my future.

Looking back, I saw that school wasn't only about books. It was about the friendships we built, the teachers who became our second parents, the discipline that prepared us for society, and the lessons that would remain long after the textbooks were closed. I thought of the competitions I had joined, the debates, the sports, and even the punishments that taught me humility. All those experiences were threads woven together to make me who I was.

Those two months of waiting became a period of transformation. Without the pressure of daily classes, I began to imagine the adult life waiting ahead of me. I asked myself big questions: Who do I want to become? What legacy do I want to leave? The answers were not always clear, but I knew one thing—I wanted my life to be meaningful, to make a difference, to lift not only myself but also my family and community.

Finally, as the days slowly counted down, I began to accept that whatever results I would receive, they would reflect my journey honestly. Whether I was first, second, or somewhere in between, the results could not erase the discipline I had built, the knowledge I had gained, and the character I had developed. They were only a gateway, not the whole story.

My reflections at The End of My High School Journey

When I walked out of the examination hall for the last time, I felt something I had never experienced before—a mixture of joy, fear, relief, and emptiness all wrapped together. For years, high school had been my second home. Every bell, every chalkboard, every corridor had shaped me in ways words cannot fully describe. Now, in just a few hours, all of it had come to an end.

I stood there quietly, watching my classmates hug one another, some laughing, some already crying. We were free, but we were also standing at the edge of a new world, one that was unknown and unpredictable. I remember telling myself, "This is not only the end of exams, it is the end of an entire chapter of my life."

At night, when I lay in bed, memories came rushing like waves. I remembered the mornings I woke up before sunrise, the evenings when fatigue almost crushed me but I kept reading anyway. I remembered the group discussions, the debates, the songs we sang together in free moments, and the punishments that taught us patience. High school had been a battlefield, but also a family.

What touched me the most was knowing that my future now rested on those papers I had filled in the examination hall. Every word I had written, every number I had calculated, every essay I had composed—they were now carrying the weight of my dreams.

But beyond the marks, I realized something deeper: high school had been my training ground for life.

As I closed this chapter, I thought of the lessons I had learned and the ones I wanted every student, every young person, to carry from my journey:

1. Hard Work Never Betrays You – It may delay, but the effort you invest in your studies and life will always show in the results.

2. Discipline is Greater Than Talent – Many people are naturally gifted, but without discipline, even talent fades. Consistency builds success.

3. Peer Pressure Can Break or Build You – Choose your friends wisely. The people around you can either drag you into failure or lift you into greatness.

4. Sacrifice Today for Tomorrow – Staying up late to read, refusing distractions, saying no to temptations—those small sacrifices create a brighter future.

5. Failures are Lessons, Not the End – Every time I struggled in a subject or test, I realized failure is only a teacher wearing a tough face.

6. Respecting Teachers Opens Doors – Teachers are not just instructors; they are guides who shape your character. Respect unlocks their wisdom.

7. Adolescence is a Test of Focus – Many students lose themselves in love affairs or bad groups. Those who stay focused rise higher.

8. Every Season Has an End – High school felt like it would last forever, but here I was at its finish line. Nothing in life is permanent, so value each stage.

9. Dream Big, But Work Bigger – Dreams are fuel, but only action turns them into reality. Without work, even the brightest dream fades.

10. Your Character is Your True Result – Marks matter, but your honesty, humility, and values are the real certificates life gives you.

As I waited for my results, I no longer feared the unknown. I understood that whether I became first or last, I had gained something more precious than grades—I had gained experience, resilience, and the determination to face life.

The end of high school was not just the end of classes; it was the birth of responsibility. From that day forward, I was no longer just a student depending on teachers and parents—I was a young adult preparing to carry my own destiny.

I wanted my readers—especially students and young people—to know that life is not about avoiding challenges but about facing them with courage. Education is not simply about passing exams; it is about preparing yourself to serve, to uplift others, and to build a future worth living in.

When I finally looked back at my journey, I didn't see only books and exams. I saw growth, mistakes, laughter, tears, friendships, sacrifices, and victories. And in all of that, I found my true story.

So, to every young person who reads these words:

Hold on to your dreams. Work when others are sleeping. Focus when others are distracted. Believe when others doubt. Because one day, you too will finish your own “exams”—whether in school, in life, or in destiny—and you will look back with pride that you gave your best.

High school may have ended, but my story had just begun.

To be continued.

# Epilogue

The long-awaited day finally arrived. The results of the national examinations were released. My heart raced as I held the paper in my hands, the weight of years of effort condensed into a single document. I read my marks slowly, carefully, and then smiled—not because I was the best in the country, but because I knew deep inside that I had given my best.

In that moment, I realized that results are not only numbers; they are a reflection of discipline, consistency, and sacrifice. They do not define a person's worth, but they can guide the path to a brighter future. What mattered most was not whether I came first or second, but that I had finished the race with integrity.

High school had ended, but life was just beginning. I stepped out with hope, carrying the lessons of discipline, patience, and perseverance. I carried the laughter of my classmates, the encouragement of my teachers, and the memory of challenges that had shaped me.

Looking back, I saw a journey full of storms and sunshine. Looking ahead, I saw a horizon of possibilities waiting for me to explore. The doors of adulthood were opening, and I was ready to walk through them with courage.

To every young person who reads this story, remember: education is not just about passing exams—it is about preparing your character to face life. When you work hard, stay disciplined, and hold onto your dreams, nothing can stop you from creating a future filled with purpose.

This is where my high school story ends, but it is also where my life's bigger story begins. And as I turn the page into a new chapter, I know one thing with certainty: the best is yet to come..